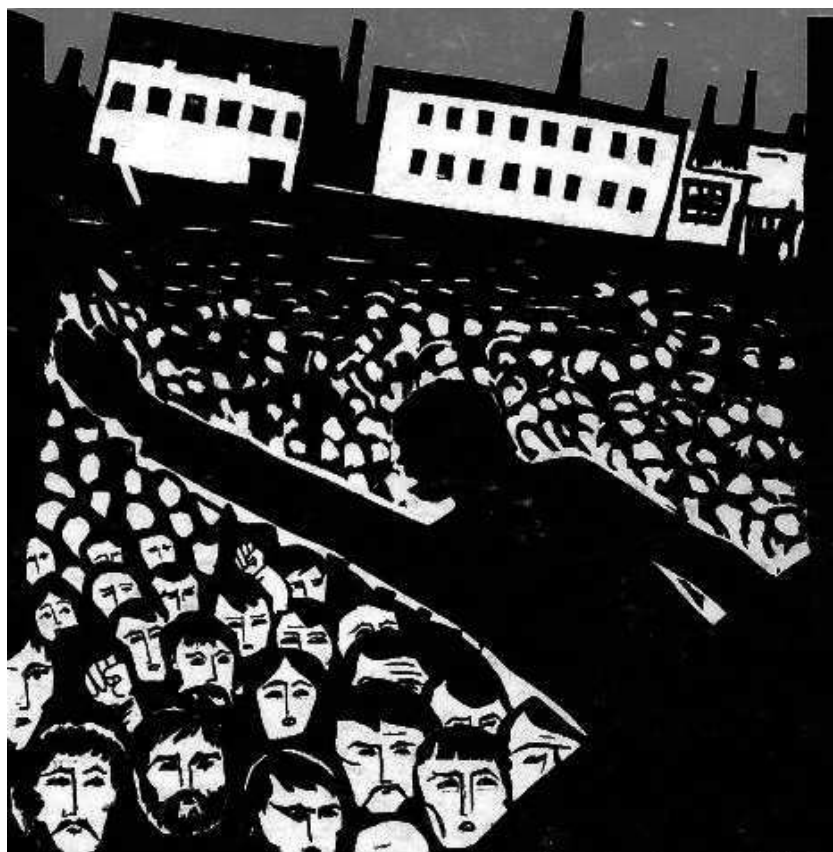


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## THE THEORY OF THE PRODUCTIVE FORCES underpinning MODERN-DAY REVISIONISM

ORGANISATION COMMUNISTE MARXISTE-LÉNINISTE

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### **Preliminary conclusions**

The historical task of the dictatorship of the proletariat is to achieve the transition from capitalism, the highest form of class society, to communism, a classless society, by attacking that which underpins the existence of classes in all spheres of social activity, namely the social division of labour. In other words, it must resolve the contradiction between private and social labour in order to eliminate the separation between the producer and social production that is the basis of human activity.

This march towards the abolition of classes can only be achieved through an intense class struggle. As a transitional society, socialism is constantly marred by lines and paths which, under a thousand guises, seek to leave the fundamental underpinnings of the social division of labour intact, thereby eventually rebuilding new exploitative strata on the same basis. If the latter triumph, proletarian power will be inexorably swept away and the march towards communism will revert to its opposite, i.e. the restoration of capitalism and a total system of exploitation of man by man.

In a state under the dictatorship of the proletariat, this process of restoration of capitalism is always carried out in the name of socialism, strengthened in the name of the proletariat and its dictatorship, appealing to an increase in its material and moral well-being. It is always carried out in the name of Marxism at the expense of a profound distortion of the revolutionary theory of the proletariat.

Revisionism relies on this transitory and contradictory nature of socialism to consolidate and rekindle the remnants of capitalism, referring to what is actually nothing more than the strengthening of the relations of exploitation as the construction of socialism. Revisionism relies on the need to develop social production in order to perpetuate and strengthen the capitalist conditions of social production, namely the division of labour involving the complete separation of the producers from the product of their labour.

In the articles published in *Pour le Parti* [For the Party] on the restoration of capitalism in China under the leadership of the Hua-Deng revisionists, we already set out how the Chinese revisionist leadership was creating a 'theoretical' windrow-dressing for its bourgeois policy in order to make it appear Marxist-Leninist under the guise of the 'Theory of the productive forces'. This pretence is hardly new, having constituted the garb of counter-revolutionaries since as far back as Marx and the First International. It is, therefore, essential to examine this question more closely, to which end this article constitutes a first step.

The stakes are indeed high. Analysing and criticising the Theory of productive forces is not only necessary in order to learn from the successes and failures of the first historical experiments in building socialism. It is also necessary in order to better grasp and combat the revisionism opposed to the proletarian revolution today, including in France, where the Theory of the productive forces also lies at the very heart of the reformist line of the French Communist Party (PCF), as well other reformist currents such as Trotskyism and anarcho-syndicalism. Subsequent articles on this question will therefore expand on the critique of revisionism and reformism regarding the specific forms they take in today's imperialist France.

This initial article examines the Theory of productive forces from the point of view of the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, intentionally limiting its scope to the economic level, with a follow-up article undertaking an analysis of the contradiction between the economic base and the superstructure, with further aspects to follow. While this article does not claim to provide answers to all of the questions raised by the failure of the socialist revolution in the USSR and China, it does serve as a starting point, if only to weed out the erroneous conceptions underpinning the theoretical bases of the socialist programme. This is a necessary task, as shown for example, by the concessions made to the Theory of productive forces criticised by our Central Committee in our brochure entitled *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat, the Only Transition to Communism*. If we want the lessons of history to be tantamount to more than merely awarding good or bad points or a sycophantic reference to a given period or individual, then it is Marxism-Leninism itself that must be placed centre stage and enriched. The aim of this article is to contribute to the enrichment of the revolutionary programme of the world proletariat, not to mask our political non-existence by harping back to the safe values of the past. We will achieve this by setting out our positions as clearly as possible, by highlighting the differences and their consequences for the class struggle, by raising the level of our organisation as a whole and the struggle within it for the construction of the programme and by looking to the other Marxist-Leninist organisations around the world.

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## THE ESSENCE OF THE THEORY OF PRODUCTIVE FORCES

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Above and beyond the various different forms that the Theory of productive forces inevitably takes amongst the revisionists, it is rooted in economism, reducing historical movement to the development of material production. The Theory of productive forces opposes the development of material production to the class struggle, to political revolution. It introduces a mechanical causal link between the social productive forces and the relations of production instead of the dialectical relationship which governs them. In a word, it upholds the idea that history is driven by the development of production, leading of its own accord to socialism without the need for political revolution (see Appendix I). In some cases, the Theory of productive forces crops up under the guise of the idea that an absolute determinism exists between the level of development of the productive forces and the revolutionary tasks. This was the case, for example, of the theory upheld by the Mensheviks in Russia against whom Lenin fought, according to which the Russian revolution had to be led in its democratic stage by the bourgeoisie, leading inexorably on to the development of capitalism, with socialism only being established when capitalism had exhausted its capacity to develop the productive forces. Trotsky used the same reasoning when he claimed that it was impossible continue with the revolution in the USSR alone because the economy was too backwards. In other instances, it raises its head in the assertion that the tasks of socialist construction consist essentially in developing production by whatever means. For such people, socialism is only superior inasmuch as it is able to develop production faster than capitalism, catching up and eventually overtaking the most advanced capitalist countries. The prime example of this is provided by Khrushchev's so-called 'Goulash Socialism', which reduced the contradiction between socialist and capitalist countries to a peaceful competition for the production of consumer goods!

In every instance, the historical role of the proletariat is reduced to its contribution to the development of production on which the transformation of society relies entirely. The revolutionisation of social relations and the march towards communism no longer rely on waging the ideological and political struggle, being reduced instead to a series of reforms attained spontaneously as the productive forces develop. The key byword of opportunism is always: *'The movement is everything, the final goal is nothing'*. And that is precisely what underpins the stance adopted by the French Communist Party (PCF) for whom nationalising the monopolies will render it possible to liberate the social productive forces, squandered today by those bent on 'wrecking' the national economy. That is what lies at the very heart of its 'socialist' programme, according to which it will ensure better growth and a better distribution of income without having to alter existing social relations one iota.

Such champions of the Theory of productive forces of course claim to be grounded in Marxism. Marxism does indeed maintain that the productive forces generally determine the relations of production with regards to historical development. It also holds that it is the economic base, the productive forces and the relations of production that ultimately determine the political, ideological and legal forms (i.e. the superstructure). But they twist Marxism and its essential character rooted in dialectical materialism by ignoring the fact that the relations of production are anything but passive or inert, but rather exerting an action in turn on the productive forces, hindering or stimulating their development and that this stimulating role calls for their permanent revolutionisation. They twist Marxism by transforming the key role played by the economic base, i.e. the dialectical relationship between the productive forces and the relations of production, into the determining role of production. They twist Marxism when they happen to 'forget' that human labour power plays the leading, decisive role amongst the productive forces (labour power, means of labour, object of labour) and that productive labour power is not strictly independent of the ideological and political conditions in which it is exercised. They twist Marxism by denying or downplaying the fact that political, ideological and legal forms act upon the economic base and that the revolution must be pursued under socialism right up to the superstructure. In short, they cut the struggle of humanity against nature off from the class struggle, thus reducing the struggle of humanity against nature to the development of production, stripping it entirely its class character and reducing the abolition of classes to the development of technology.

All these points need to be clarified. The actions recently undertaken by the Chinese revisionists already allow many aspects to be developed.

# 1) Is building socialism just about increasing production?

*“First, for socialism to replace capitalism, we must liberate the productive forces and achieve a constantly rising labour productivity to meet the people’s material and cultural needs. This is the fundamental aim of socialist revolution. Once the proletariat has seized political, power in a country, and especially after the establishment of the socialist system, it is imperative to place the focus of work squarely on economic construction, actively expand the productive forces and gradually improve the people’s standard of living”.<sup>1</sup>*

This is the objective set out for the proletariat as expressed by a senior Chinese revisionist leader once proletarian power has been established and the socialist regime set in place, focused primarily on economic construction. It is hardly surprising that such a position is warmly welcomed by the French revisionists (see document N°2). It is worth remembering that for Marxists the ‘fundamental aim’ of the dictatorship of the proletariat is the abolition of classes, the state and nations, in short, communism. For revisionists such as these, however, it involves liberating the productive forces. The primacy thus accorded to economic construction by raising productivity is encapsulated in the goal allocated today to the Chinese proletariat in the form of the Four Modernisations, namely developing agriculture and industry, catching up with the economy of the advanced countries of the world and strengthening national defence, with the abolition of classes spontaneously arising as the result of meeting the “people’s material and cultural needs”. The primacy of the productive forces upheld by the Chinese revisionists today stands in stark contradiction to the line developed during the Cultural Revolution that involved ‘Making class struggle the key’. The Chinese leadership places the development of production in opposition to the so-called ‘Gang of Four’, accused of ‘sabotaging the development of the economy’ by maintaining ‘permanent political mobilisation’, based on the premise that the political revolution has been completed with the seizure of power and the establishment of the socialist regime. In order to fully appreciate the extent of the profoundly bourgeois nature of this approach, it is necessary to briefly examine two essential points.

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## 1.1 THE IRREVERSIBLE NATURE OF SOCIALISM

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These assertions indicate that the question of whether socialism or capitalism will win out in China has been resolved once and for all, with the state definitely that of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Accordingly, once power has been seized in the superstructure and the socialist regime has been established, all that remains to be done is to develop the economy, referred to as ‘socialist’. There is no longer any question of a new bourgeoisie emerging. Indeed, with political power in the hands of the proletariat and the collectivisation of the means of production ‘exploiters no longer exist’. The bourgeoisie/proletariat contradiction no longer exists in the country or at least is no longer antagonistic in nature. As Liu Shaoqi already remarked: *“The primary contradiction was not class struggle but between the advanced socialist system and the backward productive forces”*. Therefore, the main problem that remains to be resolved is that of the backward state of the productive forces which must be developed in order to make them ‘fit in with’ to the socialist system and thus advance peacefully towards communism.

In fact, the collectivisation of the means of production achieved by the dictatorship of the proletariat by no means guarantees the definitive expropriation of the exploiters. Neither collective nor state ownership renders the private appropriation of production and the means of production impossible. While nationalisation, i.e. state ownership of the main means of production and exchange, is indispensable in building socialism, it is only a first step towards the social takeover of the productive forces and the disappearance of the state and of the commodity categories, marking the end of all independence between individual (or private) production and social production. As the example of the USSR today shows, nationalising the means of production does not preclude the existence of state capitalism. While possessing any no legal ownership as such, the new Russian bourgeoisie was nevertheless able to establish its power within the socialist structures themselves by collectively exploiting the Soviet working class and the dominated peoples through state ownership. As long as the state and state property exist, a new bourgeois

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<sup>1</sup> Speech by Ye Jianying, member of the Political Bureau of the PCC published in *Beijing Review* N° 40 (1979).

class emerging from the very heart of socialist society can very well seize it and transform the instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat into the instrument of its dictatorship over the proletariat.

*“Yesterday, the main task of the moment was, as determinedly as possible, to nationalise, confiscate, beat down and crush the bourgeoisie, and put down sabotage. Today, only a blind man could fail to see that we have nationalised, confiscated, beaten down and put down more than we have had time to count. The difference between socialisation and simple confiscation is that confiscation can be carried out by “determination” alone, without the ability to calculate and distribute properly, whereas socialisation cannot be brought about without this ability”. (Lenin, ‘Left-Wing Childishness’, Collected Works, Vol. XXVII)*

Contrary to the claims made by the Chinese revisionists, there is therefore no definitive establishment of the ‘socialist regime’. On the contrary, as a transitional phase, socialism can only be strengthened lest it wither and fail. And strengthening it is by no means reduced to ‘building the economy’. For this new bourgeoisie, the march towards communism – “to each according to their needs” – is nothing more than an issue of production and the distribution of wealth. As we shall go on to see, such assertions only serve to conceal the reality of exploitation.

*“The contradiction between relations of production and productive forces in a socialist society manifests itself primarily in the question of distribution.” Liu Shaoqi.*

*“Engels once said: ‘It is the revolutionizing of all traditional relations by industry as it develops that also revolutionizes people’s minds.’. Here Engels spoke of one of the consequences arising from the development of capitalist industry. Such being the case, doesn't it follow that under socialism the development of largescale industry [...] will bring about the revolutionization of relations among all the small collectives which will in turn revolutionize the peasants’ minds?” (Peking Review, №4, January 1978)*

The development of industry does indeed turn peasants into proletarians or unemployed workers. However, whether these proletarians have power, working to build socialism or for the bourgeoisie, is another matter entirely. Similarly, the transformation of minds requires political struggle: consciousness by no means comes about of its own accord.

What Engels actually said was:

*“According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Other than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase.” (Engels, Letter to J. Bloch, 1890)*

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## 1.2 THE DEMISE OF CLASS STRUGGLE

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For the Chinese revisionists the socialist system is no longer be a transitional period in which, according to Lenin, dying capitalism and nascent communism confront each other, but rather a society which sees the power of the proletariat entirely assured in the political sphere (where ‘socialism’ is achieved and class struggle is no more), with the ‘struggle for production’ remaining to be pursued in the economic sphere. According to the revisionists: *“Revolution is the struggle of one class against another and aims at changing the social relations between men, whereas production is the struggle of man against nature. The laws governing production are different from those governing the class struggle.”*

*“In the process of production, human beings work not only upon nature, but also upon one another. They produce only by working together in a specified manner and reciprocally exchanging their*

*activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations to one another, and only within these social connections and relations does their influence upon nature operate – i.e., does production take place.” (Marx, Wage Labour and Capital)*

This formulation turns Marxism on its head by transforming a dialectical relationship into a relationship of independence, separating the relations of humanity with nature (production) from those they establish between themselves in and for this social activity! As a result, revolution merely becomes a matter of social relations of days bygone once the latter have become socialist. All that remains is the struggle for production wholly divorced from class struggle and revolution. All that remains are ‘laws governing production’, objective economic laws.

*“The productive forces are the result of man’s practical energy, but that energy is in turn circumscribed by the conditions in which man is placed by the productive forces already acquired, by the form of society which exists before him, which he does not create, which is the product of the preceding generation. [...] Thus Mr Proudhon chiefly because he doesn’t know history, fails to see that, in developing his productive faculties, i.e. in living, man develops certain inter-relations, and that the nature of these relations necessarily changes with the modification and the growth of the said productive faculties. He fails to see that economic categories are but abstractions of those real relations, that they are truths only in so far as those relations continue to exist. Thus he falls into the error of bourgeois economists who regard those economic categories as eternal laws and not as historical laws which are laws only for a given historical development, a specific development of the productive forces.” (Marx, Letter to Pavel Annenkov, 1846)*

Marxism, on the contrary, was built up as a political economy against the bourgeois (and especially reformist) conceptions which ascribed an eternal value to economic categories. Every economic law, the scientific expression of the activities of production and exchange, is relative to a given mode of production, in other words to a historical state of development of the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, whereby it is anything but independent of the class struggle. In particular, socialism can only be built and advance towards communism by progressively eliminating the market categories inherited from capitalism. Of course, they cannot be eliminated by political will alone. One does not ‘decree’ the abolition of the law of value and commoditisation.<sup>2</sup> One does not impose the abolition of money when exchanges are still based on commoditisation, etc., a point to which we shall return later. But that is not what is at issue here. Contrary to what the revisionists claim, the key issue in building socialism resides in establishing a just relationship between the economy and politics. Just as under capitalism, under socialism the economy is at the heart of the class struggle. The revisionists express their treachery in catchphrases such as: *“Politics must serve the economy”* and *“Obey the laws of economic operations.”* For them, socialism basically achieves the fusion of politics with economics and its construction is reduced to leading the way in line with ‘objective economic laws’. Whereas communists, such as Lenin, affirm on the contrary that *“politics is a concentrated expression of economics”* and *“must take precedence over economics.”*<sup>3</sup>

To assert the primacy of politics over economics is to set other tasks for the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. those of leading the class struggle against the bourgeoisie in all spheres, including the economy (for whom, how, what to produce). This is not, of course, to deny that the state is at the service of production. This is true in general whichever class is in power. It is to affirm that the proletarian character of the state, of the ruling policy, depends on the goal set for social production, moving towards a new, communist mode of production. It therefore depends on the social relations established between the people involved in the production process: are they transformed towards the suppression of the division of labour or do they maintain or even reinforce it, thus strengthening the material bases of classes? This is what Lenin had to say against Bukharin and Trotsky who swore by the development of production alone:

*“In the final analysis, every kind of democracy, as political superstructure in general (which must exist until classes have been abolished and a classless society established), serves production and is ultimately determined by the relations of production in a given society.”<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> The mistake made by the idealistic ‘left’ involves failing to take sufficient account of these limits, seeking to transform the relations of production faster than the development of the productive forces and the ideological level reached by the masses allow. Mao criticised the existence of this kind of errors during the Great Leap Forward and which undoubtedly also existed during the Cultural Revolution.

<sup>3</sup> See Lenin, V. (1921) ‘Once again on the trade unions’. *Collected Works*, Vol. XXXII.

<sup>4</sup> Lenin, V. ‘Once again on the trade unions’. (Ibid). Underlined by us.

Contrary to the claims made by the Chinese revisionists, revolution is precisely an act whereby one class seizes political power, setting itself up as the dominant class in the whole superstructure (the state, ideology, culture, etc.) and from there revolutionises the economic base. But it is not a single act accomplished once and for all. Socialism is precisely a period of transition, of constant revolutionary movements during which, far from adapting passively to the economy, politics must on the contrary spearhead its revolutionisation. It is therefore a period when economic categories must be transformed. To see them as immutable and objective for all eternity is to see the market economy as eternal and sooner or later to unleash the full market economy, i.e., the restoration of capitalism. We will specifically address the essential question of the relationship between infrastructure and superstructure in a future article. For the moment, let us focus on examining the policy espoused by the Chinese revisionists that underpins their conception of the economy. Let us see what they mean by making the 'strengthening' of the economic material basis of socialism the key, which for them is tantamount to nothing more than developing production as we have already seen.

## 2. Restoring capitalism in the name of production

The principles of the Chinese revisionists' economic policy are best summed up in the headings of the first three chapters of leader Hou Kiaomou's Communique to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, namely:<sup>5</sup>

1. *Acknowledging the objectivity of economic laws*
2. *Complying with economic laws*
3. *Strengthening the role of economic organisations*

This speech, together with that made by Ye Jianying quoted in the previous chapter, are well worth reading insofar as they constitute to the best of our knowledge the most important theoretical efforts on the part of the Chinese revisionists to justify their bourgeois politics. These speeches appear to be very logical... but only as long as one disregards classes, the nature of political power, social relations, etc.

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### 2.1 THE WORKERS TOIL, THE EXPERTS LEAD

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This whole construct is underpinned by the bourgeois interpretation of 'economic laws'. The revisionists endow them with an 'objective', immutable character just as the movement of the tides is immutably governed by the laws of the earth's attraction: to have a correct position on economic development then boils down to knowing and applying these laws, which cannot be modified. This is instead of knowing them in order to reveal their relative character and the ways in which they are determined by any given mode of production with a view to determining the proletarian policy that will take them into account IN ORDER TO transform them. The practical implication is self-evident: what is required to carry out such an economic policy is to increase the role of experts who know and master these laws, managing it 'better' and 'increasing the role of economic organisations' instead of increasing the role and leading capacities of the proletariat to revolutionise the superstructure and the infrastructure.

Such a theory is diametrically opposed to that of Marx who, as Mao reminds us: *"began with commodities and continued until he revealed the relations between people hidden behind commodities"*. Marx never stripped the economy of its living substance, the relations between people in the production process, in order to reduce it to categories outside the class movement as the revisionists do. He showed that capital was not a cold and natural 'thing' like a pile of money, but that behind this appearance there lay the reality of a social relation between people: the exploited producers and the exploiting bourgeoisie. A sum of money only becomes capital if and when it is given value through production accrued thanks to the work of the workers. Otherwise, it is only so much shiny metal, but not capital as such.

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<sup>5</sup> *Peking Review*, N°45, 46 and 47 (1978).



The revisionists take the social relation out of the equation. As they see it, production is merely a phenomenon in which people as a whole collectively transform nature, with all class relations disappearing as soon as the means of production are collectivised. The working class then becomes nothing more than a sheer quantity of labour power, with the only issue remaining is for it to perform its task of producing as well as possible. In order for it to be used efficiently, it must therefore be directed by as many experts familiar with the laws of economics as possible and by as many engineers familiar with the laws of nature as possible. And who knows best how to make the most of a passive labour force? The capitalists, the exploitative leaders, who reap all of the benefits in today's China, placed once again in the commanding positions of the economy from which the Cultural Revolution had managed to remove them. All these specialists will be able to increase production in line with the laws they know, provided that they are allowed to decide unhindered by a proletariat with the irksome tendency to want to produce 'differently'.

*"Comrade Yaroshenko thinks that it is enough to arrange a 'rational organization of the productive forces', and the transition from socialism to communism will take place with-out any particular difficulty... He plainly declares that 'under socialism, the basic struggle for the building of a communist society reduces itself to a struggle for the proper organization of the productive forces and their rational utilization in social production'." (Stalin, Economic problems of the USSR, 1952)*

It is clear that our Chinese revisionists have their precursors. As we shall go on to show below, even if Stalin fell short of a full criticism of the Theory of the productive forces in his 1952 work, at least up until that time he refused to 'countenance' such a crudely revisionist theory as that which reduces the transition to communism to 'the rational organisation of the productive forces'.

This revisionist notion boils down to *"pushing forwards with production [which] means developing the productive forces based on innovations and the technical revolution."*<sup>6</sup> Science, technical progress, production processes, emptied of all class content: increased production becomes the sole 'guiding principle'. The political revolution is over, the technical revolution is in! The historical role of the proletariat is reduced to being the class that "observes discipline more strictly and obeys orders". The tasks of its party are to ensure that "order and stability" reign because "the great and tumultuous class struggles have come to an end" and only the order of material production remains (*Peking Review*).

At the 9<sup>th</sup> National Trade Unions Congress in China, Deng Xiaoping stated that trade unions must practice democracy in order to: "educate all members [...] The workers should carry forwards their glorious tradition of hard work, selflessness and discipline, accepting transfer of work readily and loving their enterprises like their homes."<sup>7</sup> This is the same position defended sixty years earlier by Trotsky and Bukharin concerning the *"democracy of production"* and the *"atmosphere of production"* that Lenin had so vigorously opposed, notably in his work *Once Again On The Trade Unions, The Current Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Buhkarin*<sup>8</sup>, where he criticises their bureaucratic positions intended to militarise the trade unions and turn them into an device for supervising the working class during production. Lenin opposed the appeal to the masses, their mobilisation and political education, the direct participation of the "broad masses" in the management of the economy, the establishment of a real control of the people over production. Lenin's theses triumphed at the 10<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1921 which followed this debate, and the role of the trade unions was defined as a school for leadership, management and communism. (Leading the masses to gradually take over all the affairs of society themselves).

In concrete terms, this revisionist line translates into measures such as the strengthening of passive labour discipline involving regulations, sanctions and managerial discretion. Under socialism, labour discipline is still governed by regulations. Just like the legal apparatus as a whole, these show that a separation still exists between the individual and society which will only disappear with the advent of communism. But the whole question is to determine what relations between people they reflect (see the article 'Révolution ou Contre-Révolution dans les usines chinoises' [Revolution or Counter-Revolution in the Chinese factories] in *Pour le Parti* N° 20). Are they a tool to bolster the conscious domination of the proletariat over society and therefore over production or do they tend towards an ever-greater separation between the expert managers and the workers, with the latter relegated to a socially submissive labour force?

6 *Peking Review* N° 4 (1978).

7 *Peking Review* N° 42 (1978).

8 Lenin, V. (1921) *Collected Works*, Vol. 32.

The legacy of capitalism involving the social division of labour and the regulations that express it cannot be abolished all at once. But it is to obscure the decisive issue to simply state that: *“the productive forces are the ultimate, decisive factor in promoting the development of history, and in changing the relations of production, the superstructure as well as the physiognomy of society.”*<sup>9</sup> As such, the Chinese revisionists simply uphold the capitalist path of the development of the productive forces, reinforcing the social division of labour, reducing the workers to the status of a mere auxiliary labour power of the machine, alienating the servants of the masters of production, stifling the revolutionary and creative capacities of the producer and ultimately hindering the very development of the productive forces. They subject the development of the productive forces to ‘economic laws’ which, far from being immutable, are those which govern capitalist production. In so doing, they maintain the productive forces as capital, including labour power, because they maintain this social relationship which socialism aims to destroy.

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## 2.2. IS MAKING A PROFIT A SOCIALIST PRINCIPLE?

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For the revisionists, the overriding principle is for companies to make a profit.

*“It is a glorious responsibility for the socialist enterprises to work hard in order to increase accumulation for the state and make bigger profits. Under socialist conditions what an enterprise gains is, in essence, different from capitalist profit. The gains made by a socialist enterprise are a manifestation of the workers’ conscious effort to create material wealth, provide funds for consumption, and accumulate capital for the building of socialism. This differs entirely from capitalist exploitation of the workers’ surplus value.”*<sup>10</sup>

As Marx himself stated in *Capital*, it is not, of course, the existence of surplus-labour that distinguishes capitalism from socialism: “Surplus-labour in general, as labour performed over and above the given requirements, must always remain”<sup>11</sup>, going on to characterise socialism as “a stage, on the one hand, in which coercion and monopolisation of social development (including its material and intellectual advantages) by one portion of society at the expense of the other are eliminated; on the other hand, it creates the material means and embryonic conditions, making it possible in a higher form of society to combine this surplus-labour with a greater reduction of time devoted to material labour in general”.<sup>12</sup> This raises the key issue of who appropriates and benefits from this surplus-labour and to what end is it dedicated. Capitalism appropriates this surplus-labour in the form of profit in order to constantly increase accumulation. In so doing, it tends to constantly reduce the part of the social product that it returns to the workers in the form of payment for their labour power, i.e. the direct and indirect (socialised) wage necessary for the reproduction of productive labour power and the perpetuation of the relation of exploitation. Socialism uses surplus-labour to feed the accumulation funds (replacing and increasing the means of production) and the social consumption funds (reserve funds, funds intended to cover the unproductive costs of social management: the State, collective services, the upkeep of non-workers, etc.). In order to gauge the truly proletarian rather than the de facto bourgeois character of the use of surplus-labour, it is therefore necessary to examine the policy deployed regarding the way labour and surplus-labour are distributed, the proportionality established between accumulation funds and consumption funds and who benefits from them. The revisionists deny the two opposing paths when they assert that, in any event, since surplus labour reverts to the state and the state is socialist, its use is necessarily for the benefit of the proletariat and cannot be an expression of the exploitation of man by man. However, it is precisely the policy of the state that sheds light on its socialist or bourgeois revisionist character: how it distributes the total product between the different funds and whether it allows this distribution to take place spontaneously through the play of the unequal social productivity of the units and sectors of production or whether it intervenes to ‘offset’ this inequality. In short, do these funds serve to advance towards a classless society rid of inequality or do they serve to increase the latter, reinforcing the effects of the market, competition and the division of labour and thus ultimately enriching a new exploiting class?

The revisionists’ obsession with the purely technical development of the productive forces leads them to encourage spontaneous regulation via the law of value which, they argue, should entirely govern the mechanisms of exchange and distribution, whereby *“planned prices will facilitate rational adjustments in the relationship between the*

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9 *Peking Review* N° 36 (1978).

10 Editorial of the *People’s Daily*, 27 August 1977.

11 This is in contrast to the petty bourgeois who believe that the elimination of exploitation will only take place when the workers receive ‘the full product of their labour’. Marx refutes this thesis of the ‘full product’ in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* by referring to the need to deduct for social funds, the state, etc. The whole issue posed by exploitation is what use is made of this surplus and not whether it should be deducted.

12 *Capital*, Vol. III, Chapter 48 (Section III).

*interests of the state, the collective and the individual as well as between the workers and the peasants, and will play a positive role in regulating social production [...] The law of value is the universal law of commodity economy. Its essential feature is that the value of every commodity is determined by the socially necessary labour time required to produce it. Commodity prices are based on value and commodities are exchanged on the principle of the exchange of equal values. Under socialism, the production and circulation of commodities will continue for a long time; they should be greatly developed in our country and the law of value will continue to play an indispensable part in our economic life.”<sup>13</sup>*

As a transitional, class society, commodity production and the law of value still remain under socialism (see Appendix 3). The exchange value of products will only disappear once they have lost all commodity value, in other words, when all separation between the direct producer and social production, all independence between private work, in short, when all markets and all contest between independently produced and exchanged goods have disappeared. Then, with the advent communism, there will only be an exchange of uses and no longer of commodities. As far as these historical categories are concerned, politics is therefore by no means exempt from the struggle between the two paths. In order to advance towards communism, the dictatorship of the proletariat will seek to control and limit the effects of the law of value and above all to gradually eradicate the very bedrock of its existence by permanently raising the socialisation of the means of production towards complete social appropriation (from collective to state ownership, from state ownership to the withering away of the state), using scientific planning and the political participation of the masses to reduce the interdependence of the work carried out by the different units of production, lessening the social and manufacturing division of labour (the struggle against great differences).

The revisionists talk about “*vigorously developing market production*”. As the universal and objective law governing the market economy, the law of value must play its full role in the socialist economy inasmuch as it is and remains a market economy and must, therefore, be the regulator of social production and distribution. Consequently, the policy adopted will aim to weaken the social character of appropriation, bringing the forms of ownership and the interdependence of production closer together and reinforcing the autonomy and sanctions of the market for the different units of production. In short, placing producers and products in a situation of independence and, therefore, competition.

This is why the revisionists will allow or even encourage the transfer of surplus-value from sectors with low social productivity (minor collective ownership in the countryside, small-scale industries, etc.) to the most concentrated enterprises better endowed with productive capital, which generally belong to the state sector. As a result of these differences in short-term efficiency, inequalities will increase between people’s communes with unequal wealth, between agriculture and industry, between monopolistic sectors and others, etc., effectively increasing the gap between the surpluses generated in either case. By being partly reinvested, the higher profit of the most productive state enterprises will further increase the inequalities in the rate of accumulation and by being partly distributed (notably to the managers) will further increase the inequalities in remuneration and income. What this entails is that the disparities between agriculture and industry, between town and country, between profitable and less profitable sectors, between workers and managers, etc., will be strengthened or even exacerbated.

Allowing the effects of the law of value to play out unfettered also means that all products are traded at their value. If the byword is for each company to make as much profit as possible, then the managers will be keen to increase the proportion of surplus-labour with regards to that returned to those directly responsible for production themselves. In other words, they will seek above all to produce as much as possible with as little work as possible and to reduce the remuneration of producers. The law of value then wields its dire effects on wage policy and on the intensity and discipline of labour. Labour power is nothing but a commodity to be shuffled around in line with the drive for profit. We have already denounced the policy of the Chinese revisionists who sell the workers’ labour power to imperialist capital (see *Pour le Parti* N°19 and 20). This is the logic of the principle of “*making a profit for the state*”. The Chinese state effectively becomes a temping agency, hiring out workers’ labour power to imperialism and pocketing the difference between the wages paid by the capitalists and the small part it returns to the workers.

Similarly, immediate productivity becomes the main guiding principle in production. Executives, engineers and

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<sup>13</sup> Speech by Hu Qiaomu to the State Council Meeting (*Peking Review* N°46, 1978).

managers must take full and immediate advantage of their technical skills rather than ‘wasting their time’ on other tasks, such as participating in production or encouraging political initiative and technical innovation amongst the workers. Everyone must be ‘incentivised’, with salaries and bonuses increasingly reliant on results and with the managers receiving the lion’s share. The slogan “*they who work more, earn more*” becomes the driving force behind development instead of the aim of building a communist society. Behind the expression “*socialist emulation*”, devoid of all revolutionary content, there lies nothing but the strengthening of piecework wages and the multiplication of individual or collective (but not social) incentives and bonuses, which effectively “*compels one to calculate with the heartlessness of a Shylock whether one has not worked half an hour more than anybody else*” as Lenin himself warned<sup>14</sup>.

With profit alone in the driving seat, workers “*will make a big effort if there are large profits, little effort in the case of small profits and no effort at all when there are no profits*”<sup>15</sup>, even in the case of meeting the people’s basic needs. Similarly, central planning will be put at the ‘service’ of the unfettered law of value. In place of the key task of eliminating its foundations and rendering it impractical, its only aim is to funnel the accumulation funds towards the most profitable investments, defining infrastructure choices (education, housing and urbanisation, etc.) according to immediate profit. At the same time, company management should have maximum ‘free reign’ (including the right to lay off workers) to produce what is most profitable most quickly. We know the inevitable consequences of this (see the USSR today): overproduction in certain sectors, waste, unemployment, neglecting the least profitable productions, excessive concentration in the big cities and everywhere worsening disparities and widening gaps.

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## 2.3 COMMODITY PRODUCTION AND THE NEW BOURGEOISIE

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Market relations cannot be swept away by decree with a stroke of the pen. Their transformation is the task of the whole historical period of socialism. As Marx states in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*: “*What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges*”.

The efficiency of products and productions thus continues to be underpinned by their confrontation on the market, whereby prices, taken as an expression of exchange value, continue to be the necessary ‘round-about way’ for comparing social utilities. Money remains the indispensable equivalent of exchange values. Similarly, the principle of remuneration based upon ‘to each according to their work’ allows for the division of labour that continues to prevail in a socialist society, given the fact that not everyone makes the same contribution to society and that the scarcity of products and the attitude of people towards work do not allow for ‘to each according to their needs’. (But at least the principle of ‘to each according to their work’, if and when applied, differs from capitalist modes of remuneration in that it only takes into account the work done and only allows for the appropriation of individual objects of consumption).

But saying that commodity production continues to prevail under socialism should not be taken to imply that one should close one’s eyes to it and to declare that it is acceptable on the grounds that it serves to ‘regulate’ the economy. On the contrary, it means that: a) it must be limited and gradually eliminated; and b) it inevitably gives rise to a bourgeoisie.

Following on from Marx, Lenin strongly reiterated that “the bourgeoisie is born out of commodity production” and the widening gaps that arise due to the law of value (town/countryside, manual/intellectual, managers/masses, etc.)<sup>16</sup>.

It is vital to understand where this bourgeoisie comes from, how it behaves and what its aim is in order to be able to combat it. In the USSR, Stalin only came to realise the problem late on. In his *Speech to the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress*

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14 Lenin (1917) ‘The State and Revolution’ (Chapter 5), *Collected Works*, Vol. 25.

15 Taken from the remarkable article ‘Ideological Weapon for Restricting Bourgeois Right’ published in *Peking Review* N° 22 (1975).

16 See our brochure *La dictature du Proletariat, seule transition au communisme* [The Dictatorship of the Proletariat, the Only Transition to Communism].

of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1952, he speaks of the existence of this bourgeoisie in the USSR, thirty-five years after the seizure of power and twenty years after collectivisation! He denounced bureaucratisation and the degeneration of certain cadres and criticised Party organisations “*which had become privileged administrative institutions serving only to give orders*”, going on to criticise leaders who took advantage of their position to enrich themselves “*going so far as to turn enterprises into their personal fiefdoms*”. However, the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress stopped short of a thorough analysis of the roots of the existence of the bourgeoisie under socialism and failed to prevent it from seizing all state power.

Mao Zedong and the Chinese revolutionaries went much further in analysing the bourgeoisie under socialism and the struggle against it, showing how privileged sectors took advantage of their place in production (and also in the superstructure) thanks to the very existence of commodity production and the division of labour with a view to strengthening their positions under the guise of ‘economic efficiency’ and ‘developing the productive forces’. At the political level, their representatives opposed the Theory of the productive forces to the revolutionaries who sought to limit the effects and scope of intervention of commodity production (see the following chapter). Were such revisionists ever to come to power, they would be able to tear down all the barriers holding back the free reign of commodity production under socialism.

Who are these newly privileged bourgeois capitalist roadsters? They are to be found, for example, amongst those at the head of the state enterprises (not all of course, there is no hard and fast rule) in the most concentrated and productive sector and who tend to seek to benefit from the higher profits made by these enterprises. They of course push for everything to be judged ‘according to the criteria of profit’ and to be granted a ‘free reign’. Under the guise of ‘remuneration according to work’, they actually push for remuneration according to capital, according to profits and power. In other words, the greatest ‘salaries’ for the most ‘successful’ companies and their managers. These leaders merge with the bureaucratised cadres of the state apparatus and the Party, all of whom seek to take advantage of their position to secure privileges and advantages (they will also inevitably find allies in other strata of the population such as small producers, politically backward elements, certain intellectuals, etc. However, we shall refrain here from a detailed discussion of the social base of the revisionists in China).

Thus, a new bourgeoisie is formed whose battle cry will be the Theory of productive forces outlined above and whose aim is to create true State Capitalism. For, once they have seized state power, it is a question of systematically rolling out of what was until then merely a trend within socialist society, i.e. the collective appropriation by them of the surplus-value produced by the workers. The USSR today is the most striking example of such State Capitalism. As this example shows, we cannot allow ourselves to be taken in by the revisionist reasoning which equates socialist society with a society where ownership is collectivised. We have already pointed out that collectivisation and even state ownership of the means of production and exchange still only partially achieves the social appropriation necessary for all vestiges of private property and the interdependence between producers and products to disappear. As long the state remains, there will be a contradiction between the individual and society, between production units and social needs. The question then is who controls, who directs and which policy is in the commanding position at the head of the state, which can be gauged by analysing all of the social relations and their evolution, assessing the extent to which the capitalist legacy is being erased, commodity production reduced and the division of labour transformed. In short, the key issue is to determine towards what aim the movement of these social relations is headed, whereas the revisionists would have us believe that communist social relations will arise spontaneously from the development of the productive forces which they claim to be ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’.

We can round off this brief, cursory presentation of the Theory of productive forces with this phrase coined by Zhang Chunqiao (one of the so-called Gang of Four) when referring to the USSR: “Sputnik has gone up and the red flag has come down”, which could be rephrased as: “Electricity is everywhere, but the soviets are no more”.

*“This time when our delegation went to the Soviet Union, we came straight to the point on a number of questions. I told Comrade Chou En-lai over the phone that these people are blinded by their material gains and the best way to deal with them is to give them a good dressing down. What are their material gains? Nothing but 50 million tons of steel, 400 million tons of coal, and 80 million tons of petroleum. Does this amount to much? Not at all. Now at the sight of this much their heads are swelled. What Communists! What Marxists! I say multiply all that tenfold, or even a hundredfold, it still doesn't amount to much. All you have done is to extract something from the earth, turn it into steel and make*

*some cars, planes, and what not. What is so remarkable about that? And yet you make all this such a heavy burden on your backs that you even cast away revolutionary principles. Isn't this being blinded by material gains? If one attains high office, one can be blinded by material gain too". (Mao Zedong, Talk at a conference of secretaries of party committees, Selected Works Vol. V, 1957)*

## 3. The economic basis of the march to communism

The time has come to oppose the revisionist path with the guiding principles of the revolutionary path in order to avoid the false alternative that tends to set in following the historical failures of socialism: on the one hand, apparently 'leftist' position (as espoused today by the 'theoreticians' grouped today around Charles Bettelheim and the review *Communiste*) which states that as long as commodity production remains, then socialism, the lower phase of communism, does not and has never existed. For them, it is only a veiled form of state capitalism without the seizure of power by the proletariat and its party leading to any political or economic revolution. And, on the other, the revisionist theses for whom there is no need to be concerned about commodity production because it by no means stands in contradiction to the construction of a society advancing towards communism. Accordingly, the sole difference between the economy under socialism and the economy under capitalism would reside in the nationalisation of the main means of production and exchange which would enable the productive forces thus liberated to develop more rapidly under socialism of their own accord, with the rest, i.e., the suppression of classes, following naturally on from there.

We have already noted how in 1951 Stalin reversed mistakes he had made in the 1930s and criticised the thesis that socialism involved working towards '*a rational organisation of the productive forces*'. While recalling that men cannot change economic laws as they see fit or by their will alone insofar as they are the expression of a determined mode of production, he also noted that they are relative in character because "*they, or at least the majority of them, operate for a definite historical period, after which they give place to new laws*"<sup>17</sup>. He specifically cites the example of the law of value, noting that "*value, together with the law of value, is a historical category tied to the existence of commodity production*" which would disappear during the superior phase of communism. As Engels himself had already noted: "*Direct social production and direct distribution preclude all exchange of commodities, therefore also the transformation of the products into commodities (at any rate within the community) and consequently also their transformation into values.*"<sup>18</sup>

That is the first point, the main thing to note being how the scope of commodity exchanges must be limited and reduced under socialism, limiting and reducing the role played by the law of value in production and distribution. It is also important to note that immediately after the Russian or Chinese revolutions it was only to be expected that a substantial place was left for a time to commodity exchanges and to small-scale capitalist production given the context of relatively backward economic development. However, the fact that the Chinese revisionists today harp back to Lenin's works, the New Economic Policy or Mao's writings from the 1950s demonstrates quite simply that they want to go back in time to justify what was then a situation rendered necessary only by dint of the backward level of the economy.

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### 3.1 THE TRANSFORMATION OF COMMODITY EXCHANGES

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Faced with the existence of the law of value, the dictatorship of the proletariat can neither deny it nor submit to it. It must use all the means at its disposal to by collectivising of the means of production, transforming the state and the conscious mobilisation of the masses to restrict and limit its effects, taking into account the existence of commodity categories whilst at the same time fighting to transform them: the key to this transformation must be the increased socialisation of the means of production and of products. Marx stated that: "*As a general rule, articles of utility become commodities, only because they are products of the labour of private individuals or groups of*

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17 Stalin, J. (1952) 'Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR', *Collected Works*, Vol. XVI.

18 Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Part III: Socialism, Chapter IV: Distribution

*individuals who carry on their work independently of each other.*"<sup>19</sup>. It involves broadening the coordination between units of different productions via the political control of exchanges between them, which Lenin referred as to "counting, listing, distributing" (see insert). In short, it requires a plan led by a policy designed to transform social relations.

For example, we have already described how the free reign of the law of value led to the uneven development of the largest and most productive units. To counter this tendency, the revolutionary line in China (the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution) rolled out a price policy that tended to re-establish the balance between the different sectors, guaranteeing prices for the rural sectors, reducing the tax burden, providing a cheaper supply of basic products (such as fertilisers, tractors, etc.) in such a way that heavy industry did not stifle the other sectors. Productive forces could be deployed everywhere despite disparities in social productivity, rather than leaving masses of workers (peasants in this case, but also women and young people) unemployed, which the state sector alone could not mobilise. Rural collectives could invest and increase productivity, relying on the mobilisation of labour and all available means of production (e.g. Tatchai), without these being immediately squeezed out of commodity exchanges as a consequence of their lower returns. The most productive units of the state sector did not use the surplus labour thus released for their own self-financing or for the remuneration of their workers but to lower their selling prices to the lagging sectors and to feed the fund of social accumulation, putting their progress at the service of social production as a whole. This is the way to an increasing equalisation of the conditions of production thereby reducing differences and the social division of labour.

This policy based on the mobilisation of the masses relying on their own forces is the only way capable of motivating them and developing their consciousness based on and calling for a change in social relations precisely because it calls for 'bottom up' initiative not 'top down' orders. It requires the increasing participation of everyone in the 'exercise of power'. It calls for increased participation on the part of all existing productive forces (people and means of production) instead of retaining only what is 'profitable' and generating unemployment. This is the policy known as 'walking on two legs' (see in particular Mao's text *On the Ten Major Relationships*).

In line with this revolutionary policy, it is necessary to tend progressively towards limiting and then replacing production regulated by the law of value by production guided by use-value, i.e. exerting complete control over the material conditions of production, distribution and consumption.

*"From the moment when society enters into possession of the means of production and uses them in direct association for production, the labour of each individual, however varied its specifically useful character may be, becomes at the start and directly social labour. The quantity of social labour contained in a product need not then be established in a roundabout way; [...] It is true that even then it will still be necessary for society to know how much labour each article of consumption requires for its production. It will have to arrange its plan of production in accordance with its means of production, which include, in particular, its labour-powers. The useful effects of the various articles of consumption, compared with one another and with the quantities of labour required for their production, will in the end determine the plan. People will be able to manage everything very simply, without the intervention of much-vaunted 'value'." (Engels, Engels, Anti-Dühring, Part III: Socialism, Chapter IV: Distribution)*

From the very outset of the dictatorship of the proletariat, a part of production and distribution is consciously removed from the regulatory mechanisms of the law of value. On the one hand, the voluntary and conscious initiative of the workers in voluntary work (which Lenin hailed as the 'Great Initiative') for the benefit of society as a whole though political and ideological mobilisation which leads to enormous leaps in the social productivity of labour (e.g. Taking). On the other hand, the growing share of products necessary for the masses, already distributed according to the principle of 'to each according to their needs' (healthcare, housing, basic foodstuffs, education, culture, etc.) either free of charge or at prices fixed by political decision. This sector of social work must expand as the productive forces grow, as people's consciousness rises, as their conception of work changes, whereby social wealth will gradually no longer involve an "immense accumulation of commodities" but by what Marx refers to as "real wealth", i.e., use-values and "useful social effects." (See Appendix IV).

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19 Marx, K. (1867) *Capital*, Vol. I, Section 4: The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof.

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## 3.2 UNDERMINING THE BASIS FOR THE RESTORATION OF BOURGEOIS POWER

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The dictatorship of the proletariat is not only distinguished from capitalism by its capacity to organise the development of the productive forces in this way. It does not reduce the question of communism to the production of abundant goods. Or rather, the conscious proletariat knows that the growth of the productive forces is linked to a change in social relations and that in order to achieve communist society it is necessary to destroy everything that remains of 'dying capitalism'. As far as the economic base is concerned (which this article is limited to), what is striking about revisionist theories is not only their insistence on commodity production, the law of value, remuneration according to labour (in fact, according to profits) and maintaining the social division of labour, but also their refusal to take into account that it requires class struggle to eliminate these expressions of 'dying capitalism'. Moreover, far from recognising that these are transitory forms of the relations between the people involved in production and the distribution of what they produce, they claim that they are an entirely new mode of production. Socialism would be totally different from capitalism and would only have to evolve 'peacefully' towards communism as the productive forces develop, to which end the relations of production would be astutely adapted under the benevolent eye of a superstructure which would be definitively and in essence proletarian (whereas, while absolutely necessary, the very existence of the state under socialism entails the contradiction involving expressions of the survival of capitalism).

Stalin himself also supported this thesis when he declared in 1939: "*Now the main task of our state inside the country is the work of peaceful economic organization and cultural education.*"<sup>20</sup>, whilst at the same time proclaiming that antagonistic class contradictions had been abolished in the USSR.

He began to criticise it later in 1952 when he opposed Yaroshenko when he stated: "*The categories of political economy - value, commodity, money, credit, etc., - are replaced by a healthy discussion of the rational organization of the productive forces in social production, that, consequently, the subject of investigation of this political economy will not be the production relations of socialism, but "the elaboration and development of a scientific theory of the organization of the productive forces, theory of economic planning, etc."*. Stalin replied: "*What is the effect, in a political economy of socialism, of replacing economic problems by problems of organization of the productive forces? The effect is to abolish the political economy of socialism [which] investigates the laws of development of men's relations of production.*"<sup>21</sup>.

But while positing that socialism in the economic field involves the revolutionary transformation of the relations of production, Stalin did not actually take the struggle in that direction. In fact, he could not, as shown in his most formally correct text *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* on this question<sup>22</sup>, which reduces the struggle for the transformation of the relations of production to the struggle for the transformation of ownership (collectivisation). For Stalin, these relations of production remained imperfect in the USSR owing to the fact that two forms of ownership still existed, namely the collective kolkhozes and cooperative ownership (belonging to groups of people) and state property (belonging of the people as a whole). Progressing everywhere to the higher form of ownership of the people as a whole would eliminate commodity exchanges and allow for the transition to the higher phase of communism.<sup>23</sup>

It is right to say that the existence of forms of ownership that do not belong to the people as a whole constitutes a fundamental basis for the reproduction of inequalities between groups with differing production conditions. For example, a kolkhoz with excellent land can become richer than another with poorer conditions. Collective ownership by the people as a whole is necessary for the full development of the new communist attitude of people towards work, i.e. for the benefit and progress of all rather than the personal enrichment of any single group.

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20 Stalin, J. (1939) 'Report on the Work of the Central Committee to the 18th Congress of the CPSU(b)'. *Collected Works*, Vol. XIV.

21 Stalin, J. (1952) 'Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR'. *Collected Works*, Vol. XVI. (Underlined by us).

22 Including in relation to Dialectical and Historical Materialism where one finds erroneous formulations such as: "Under the socialist system [...] the mutual relations of people in the process of production are marked by comradely cooperation and the socialist mutual assistance of workers who are free from exploitation. Here the relations of production fully correspond to the state of productive forces; for the social character of the process of production is reinforced by the social ownership of the means of production", although there is still a social division of labour and, therefore, classes and class struggle. (See Commission of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. (B.) (1939) *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)*, Chapter 2 (Section 2).

23 Stalin, J. (1952) 'Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR' (Op. Cit.)



However, while that form of property is a necessary basis for new relations of production it is not sufficient in and of itself, remaining at the lower stage of communism, a point to which we shall return later.

Furthermore, Stalin underestimated the need to combat commodity exchange and its consequences under socialism when he declared that: "*commodity production leads to capitalism only if there is private ownership of the means of production.*"<sup>24</sup> The example of today's USSR alone stands to show that state capitalism can exist without private property.

It is even more important to understand that market exchange inevitably tends towards the restoration of capitalism and may well ultimately lead to capitalism even if private ownership no longer exists. Mao noted that certain "*communes growing industrial crops are thriving, accumulation levels have been raised to 45 percent, and the peasants' living standard is high*".<sup>25</sup> This disparity also existed in the USSR: "*In 1953, calculations for the financial income of the collective farms covering hundreds of hectares of land for agricultural use in the USSR yield the following figures: 51% of the collective farms have an income of below 100,000 roubles/100ha, 40% between 10 and 50,000 roubles and only 9% with over 50,000 roubles*"<sup>26</sup>.

It is clear that such a situation (which is accompanied by different sectors of exchange: state trade, cooperative trade, rural markets where merchandise sellers can intervene), feeds trends towards inequality, enrichment and individualism even if the forms of ownership are collective and even if they are state-owned insofar as the law of value can still come into play. It is therefore necessary to be wary of the possibilities of the restoration of capitalism, clearly explaining that we are still only at the lower phase of communism, striving to immediately correct the capitalist tendencies through political decisions by imposing limits on the law of value.

It is worth recalling at this point how Marx posed the problem with a very lucid analysis of the two fundamental phases of the transition to communism, precisely in order to avoid thinking that we have 'arrived' as soon as the means of production have been collectivised.

Describing the first phase as "*still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it comes*", he goes on to say that it is characterised by the fact that: "*The means of production belong to the whole of society*". This is indeed the primary task in the economic sphere and creates the conditions for changes in other aspects of the relations of production when everyone receives according to their work and products can be exchanged without the intermediary of money: "*After a deduction is made of the amount of labour which goes to the public fund, every worker, therefore, receives from society as much as he has given to it.*"<sup>27</sup> (It should be noted that neither the USSR or China ever actually reached this 'lower' phase).

There is still an exchange of quantities of labour between producers within society, a feature noted by Marx: "*Here, obviously, the same principle prevails as that which regulates the exchange of commodities, as far as this is exchange of equal values. Content and form are changed, because under the altered circumstances no one can give anything except his labour, and because, on the other hand, nothing can pass to the ownership of individuals, except individual means of consumption. But as far as the distribution of the latter among the individual producers is concerned, the same principle prevails as in the exchange of commodity equivalents: a given amount of labour in one form is exchanged for an equal amount of labour in another form.*"<sup>28</sup>

Marx notes that this exchange of equal quantities of labour is an "equal right", which remains a "bourgeois right". For example, individuals differ (weak/strong, with or without family responsibilities, educated or not, etc.) as do the conditions under which they work, whereby one will receive more than another. Lenin concludes by saying that: "*the mere conversion of the means of production into the common property of the whole society (commonly called 'socialism') does not remove the defects of distribution and the inequality of 'bourgeois laws'*".

This is because the conditions of production and the place of people in the production process remain unequal and people themselves still remain physically and intellectually unequal. Marx and Lenin clearly staked out the limits of

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24 Stalin, J. (1952) 'Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR', Section 2: Commodity Production Under Socialism (Op. Cit.)

25 Mao Zedong (1961-62) 'Reading Notes on The Soviet Text Political Economy' (Part II). *Selected Works*, Vol. VIII.

26 URSS, *la dégénérescence*, published by Editions E100 (p. 20).

27 Lenin, V. (1917) 'The State and Revolution', Section 3: The First Phase of Communist Society. *Collected Works*, Vol. XXV, commenting on Critique of the Gotha Programme.

28 Marx, K. (1875) 'Critique of the Gotha Programme', Part I (Op. Cit.)

this first phase of communism, which – unlike Mao and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution – Stalin neither took up nor developed. They draw a clear distinction between what has fundamentally changed in this first phase in relation to capitalism (the impossibility of owning the means of production and accumulating capital on an individual basis, the impossibility of receiving more than that generated by one's labour) and what still constitutes the "birthmarks" of capitalism" (the social division of labour and 'bourgeois law') in the relations of production. However, our revisionists are characterised here by the confusion they create by failing to clearly distinguish between the different stages of the transition to communism, presenting things to the masses as if 'the main thing' had been accomplished with the seizure of power and the establishment of ownership by the people as a whole on a national scale. It is obvious that the purpose of this fabrication is intended to prevent the masses from perceiving the need to push on with the class struggle, by leading them believe that socialism has arrived at its superior phase as soon as collectivisation is complete and that all that remains to be done is to produce. In short, portraying something that is actually still in only its infancy as supposedly fully accomplished.

Let us return to the example of the distribution issue alluded to in the previous section.

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The Chinese revisionists waged an intense campaign against the so-called Gang of Four who were, in their view, wrong to consider that the principle of 'to each according to their work' was 'a capitalist principle'. But neither they nor indeed Mao himself, whom the revisionists are attacking, ever said such a thing. The question posed by the Cultural Revolution on this subject was not to deny the difference between 'to each according to their work' and 'to each according to their capital, their class', but rather to understand that this principle still bears of the "birthmarks" of capitalism and the extent to which it can still serve as an economic basis for the existence of classes and for a tendency to restore capitalism. It sought, therefore, to understand the need to push on with the revolution in order to root out capitalism completely, a task which must be carefully tended to under socialism.

Just like all the others, the revisionists deny that this aspect of the relations of production must be transformed. Instead, they call 'to each according to their work' a socialist principle, denying that socialism – and, by extension, this principle in particular – is a transitional society 'blending' capitalism and socialism. In their view, differences in income are unimportant because they are 'limited' and lower than those under capitalism, with those who have more money unable to transform it into capital, arguing therefore that differences in income actually stimulate the development of the productive forces through the appeal of gain.<sup>29</sup>

The Cultural Revolution fought precisely to attenuate (not to immediately abolish) the principle of 'to each according to their work' and to limit its effects. Wage differences express and accentuate the division of people into different categories based on the different place they occupy in production. But amongst those most favoured by the division of labour they create the desire to profit even further by exploiting their situation to obtain ever more, to attain other benefits, to monetise their 'skills' ever more expensively, using any pretence to accentuate the 'efficiency' of the differences that work to their advantage. They will strive to expand the 'bourgeois law' that protects them, recognising the superior value of the labour power of the cadres under socialism, thereby effectively widening the division of labour by commanding an ever-higher price for their labour. These cadres will comprise a tendency within the state and the Party for a specific political line to triumph, presenting technology as the key driving force behind the development of the productive forces, concentrating technology in the hands of 'experts' as the motor for its development. By presenting this line as 'socialist' in opposition to the 'leftists', they will attempt to seize state power in order to apply it freely, as indeed happened in the USSR and China where, under the guise of developing the productive forces, they put the Liu Shaoqi's slogan "*Making the people rich and the country strong*" in the driving seat. Self-enrichment becomes the goal and it is not long before the use of private capital, which is now widely used in China, is restored.

In the face of this thirst for gain, communists have always opposed conscious communist work, with the need for 'motivation' to work freely for society as a whole to replace that of the self-enrichment of an individual group or nation. Even after the Russian Revolution, Lenin did not laud the principle of 'to each according to their own work', but was enthusiastic about the birth of nascent communist shoots, praising the initiative of the railway workers,

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<sup>29</sup> This is precisely what is set out in the long article entitled 'Implementing the Socialist Principle "To Each According to His Work"' published in *Peking Review* N° 31 (1978).

the famous *subbotniks*, i.e., “unpaid labour with no quota set by any authority or any state [who] constitute the labour of individuals on an extensive scale for the public good.”<sup>30</sup>. While realising that under socialism the survival of old mentalities, classes and differences renders it impossible to abolish norms, rewards, regulations and remuneration according to one’s work, communists see these as things that must disappear by stimulating, protecting and encouraging the emergence of new things from the most advanced working classes. They do not exalt but rather organise the demise of what must disappear, such as the division of labour and the watchword of ‘to each according to their work’.

The opposite is true for the Chinese revisionists who claim that this principle is ‘not applied enough’, portraying the problems that socialist society must resolve as merely the existence of insufficient production to generate wealth for all, with increasing wealth in order to increase what everyone receives as the way forwards: “As for that part of inequality the principle ‘to each according to his work’ entails, it consists only of differences that exist among the labouring masses in the course of their advance towards the goal of providing plenty for all.”<sup>31</sup> Just as the bourgeoisie proclaims everywhere, differences are not important, only the union of all classes for the fatherland to triumph, enriching it so that growing the cake will increase the portion everyone receives. This stands in stark contrast, therefore, to fighting for the elimination of differences and the suppression of classes.

## Preliminary conclusions

The revisionists deny the existence of material conditions in the economic bases of socialism (the relations of production) that favour the re-emergence of a bourgeoisie. They deny this in order to camouflage their own existence as a bourgeois class.

It is only by recognising and a carrying out detailed analysing of the existence of the material bases of the bourgeoisie that one can strive to eliminate them and achieve the result whereby “it will be impossible for the bourgeoisie to exist, or for a new bourgeoisie to arise” (Lenin). While revisionists do occasionally acknowledge that these material bases exist owing to the different forms ownership, they only do so in order to deny that they are also fundamentally rooted in the social division of labour and the unequal distribution that derives from it.

The appropriation of the means of production by the people as a whole creates the conditions for the abolition of commodity exchanges, money and exploitation. But this does not mean that we have to ‘wait’ until the form of ownership that holds sway everywhere becomes that of the people as a whole before fighting for the revolutionary transformation of the division of labour and distribution (other ‘aspects’ of the relations of production). All of the elements that make up the relations of production must be transformed in unison, starting with the form of ownership.

While collective ownership is a first step towards setting up mutual support and collaboration in production by replacing the relations of exploitation, that does not make it a social ‘appropriation’ of the means of production on an equal footing for all producers. In fact, for a long time, workers will continue to operate the machines and do not dominate the whole process of production inherited from capitalism, neither at the factory level, nor indeed at the level of society as a whole. This is because capitalism organised the appropriation of science and technology on the side of a thin layer of managers (the intellectual powers of production) and deprived the worker of the mastery of the production process (a subject to which we shall return in another article). In fact, the authority of the ‘experts’ continues to exist under socialism, and the worker still sees natural forces, technical problems and economic laws loom up before him like so many arcane conundrums that only the ‘experts’ seems capable of mastering, dictating from on high how the means of production should be used and coordinated thanks to their knowledge. The real appropriation of the means of production goes beyond the form of ownership to their mastery by all producers.

This is indeed why Marxists have above all linked the existence of classes to the social division of labour rather than exclusively to forms of ownership unlike the revisionists.

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30 Lenin (1919) Report On Subbotniks Delivered To A Moscow City Conference Of The R.C.P. (B.), Collected Works, Vol. 30.  
31 *Peking Review* N°6 (1978).

“Since the historical appearance of the capitalist mode of production, the appropriation by society of all the means of production has often been dreamed of, more or less vaguely, by individuals, as well as by sects, as the ideal of the future. But it could become possible, could become a historical necessity, only when the actual conditions for its realization were there. Like every other social advance, it becomes practicable, not by men understanding that the existence of classes is in contradiction to justice, equality, etc., not by the mere willingness to abolish these classes, but by virtue of certain new economic conditions. The separation of society into an exploiting and an exploited class, a ruling and an oppressed class, was the necessary consequences of the deficient and restricted development of production in former times. So long as the total social labour only yields a produce which but slightly exceeds that barely necessary for the existence of all; so long, therefore, as labour engages all or almost all the time of the great majority of the members of society — so long, of necessity, this society is divided into classes. Side by side with the great majority, exclusively bound slaves to labour, arises a class freed from directly productive labour, which looks after the general affairs of society: the direction of labour, State business, law, science, art, etc. It is, therefore, the law of division of labour that lies at the basis of the division into classes. [...] But if, upon this showing, division into classes has a certain historical justification, it has this only for a given period, only under given social conditions. It was based upon the insufficiency of production. It will be swept away by the complete development of modern productive forces. [...] The possibility of securing for every member of society, by means of socialized production, an existence not only fully sufficient materially, and becoming day-by-day more full, but an existence guaranteeing to all the free development and exercise of their physical and mental faculties — this possibility is now, for the first time, here, but *it is here*”.<sup>32</sup>

According to Marx, in order to achieve communism and the elimination of classes it is necessary to achieve the: *“abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from these social relations.”*<sup>33</sup> And Marx notably characterised the higher phase of communist society as the end of *“the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life’s prime want [...]”*<sup>34</sup>.

Based on these principles, the Cultural Revolution in China emphasised the link between ‘promoting production and making the revolution’, whereby the increase in the productive forces is not primarily aimed at enrichment but at freeing people from gruelling tasks and at distributing the work that is still necessary *“among all members of society without exception, and thereby to limit the labour-time of each individual member to such an extent that all have enough free time left to take part in the general—both theoretical and practical—affairs of society”*, in line with to Engels’ statement in *Anti-Dühring*, where he adds that it is only then that *“every ruling and exploiting class has become superfluous”*.

Hence the importance of measures to reduce the gap between manual and intellectual workers, such as the revolution in education and culture, the participation of the managers in production work and the workers in management. Measures designed to ensure that not only intellectuals become one with the workers, but that the very way of producing changes in such a way that the work of each is genuinely ‘enriched’, as the capitalists themselves put it. Contrary to bourgeoisie claims, the social division of labour is not doomed to perpetuate itself endlessly for purely ‘technical’ and ‘efficiency’ reasons. It is linked to the mode of production that capitalism has created with the aim of disciplining, demeaning and supervising the working class. Depriving the workers of knowledge and dividing their work reduces them to the role of a cog of no particular value insofar as they are interchangeable: it makes it possible to time and control the work they do and to set norms in place; it leads them to believe that science and technology are truly separate from production and are forever inaccessible to them, literally a *Deus ex machina* directing forces which appear to the producers as alien to and working against them.

Basically, the communists are simply pointing out that humans are the key factor in the productive forces. It is they who create, use and perfect the means of production. Capitalism has created a division between a mass of exploited people who are vowed to perform the tasks dictated by the ‘intellectual powers’ who have arrogated the monopoly of knowledge. Communism seeks to re-establish the unity of humanity between production (the source of all knowledge) and science. It seeks to create a new breed of conscious workers. It seeks to enable all humanity to

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32 Engels, F. (1880) ‘Socialism: Utopian and Scientific’, Part III: Historical Materialism. Marx/Engels *Selected Works*, Volume III. (Underlined by us).

33 Marx, K. (1895) ‘The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850’. *Selected Works*, Vol. I.

34 Marx, K. (1875) ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’. *Selected Works*, Vol. III, Section I.

release its creative energy and to ensure “the all-around development of the individual” (Marx). There is no other way to develop the productive forces more rapidly and more massively than to unleash the manual and intellectual labour power of humanity which capitalism has crushed by maiming hundreds of millions of people by separating ‘the arms from the head’.

As we shall see in forthcoming articles, just like the Chinese and Russian revisionists, the French reformists spearheaded by the French Communist Party (PCF) deny the need to combat the social division of labour, praising ‘science’ and ‘the experts’, minimising the contradictions they entail for the working class. In France, the proletarian revolution will not encounter excessive difficulty in establishing collective ownership, so much so that capitalism has already socialised production and concentrated the apparatus. The banks, the monopolies and the trusts constitute enterprises whose nationalisation will then immediately transfer the essential part of the economy into the hands of the proletarian state. On the other hand, the social division of labour has been pushed to the extreme, creating millions of proletarians dispossessed of qualifications, reduced to repeating the same daily grind on the assembly line thousands of times. Such a lack of qualifications engenders so much despondency at work that the capitalists themselves speak of ‘enriching the tasks’ (see *Pour le Parti* N° 21). This pinpoints the key problem that the socialist revolution in France will have to face regarding the question of the transformation of the relations of production, the social division of labour and the transformation of all methods of production. It is this problem that the revisionists elude. It is this problem that the Cultural Revolution began to address, hence the enthusiasm it aroused (despite the specious ways in which it has most often been portrayed). The revolutionary movement of the proletariat in France will certainly enable us to find the means and the solutions to go even further (which are impossible to pre-empt in advance).

Mao quite rightly said: “To ignore ideology and politics, to be always preoccupied with business matters—the result will be a disoriented economist or technologist and that is dreadful. Ideological and political work is the guarantee for the completion of economic, technological work and it serves the economic base. Ideology and politics are, moreover, the commanders [...]”.<sup>35</sup>

And for them to play this role, proletarian ideology and politics must be in the driving seat throughout the whole superstructure, to which end we must soon complete this article with another on the revolution in the superstructure as a condition for the revolution in the infrastructure.

Charles Paveigne - Patrick Morvan



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<sup>35</sup> Mao Zedong (1958) ‘Sixty Points on Working Methods – A Draft Resolution from the Office of the Centre of The CPC’, *Selected Works*, Vol. VIII.