

INSTITUTE RESOURCE PAPER #3: HOW AND WHY THINGS CHANGE

The oldest problem in philosophy is the question of how and why change.

Everyone is a philosopher and, as such, has to have answers to questions presented by nature. Primitive religions arose to answer unanswerable questions. People conceived and worshipped a rain god who made it rain. This philosophy remained unchanged until people scientifically understood the reason it rained. Then that god was dropped. How it changed from drought to rain was and is a serious question. Even more serious were questions of how does a society change.

All life is motion and all motion is a series of changes. So, this question of change is fundamental to all philosophy. Unless and until this question was answered, no one could seriously plan for the future.

Every culture has its "Que sera, sera." Serious people cannot work under the idea that fate has them in its grip and they have no control over what is going to happen. People have to plan for the future and that planning can only be as good as the scientific propositions that allow them to understand the future – that is, the changes that take place between now and then.

Early on, we set about grappling with the process of change. Too many revolutionary organizations in the West essentially were sects populated by true believers who strove for a change from capitalism but had no idea how that change would come about. Therefore, they could neither anticipate or facilitate it.

We set about solving this problem by observing motion in the material world, extracting conclusions as to why and how things changed, and testing our conclusions on social development.

Our conclusion was that there are two kinds of change. One is quantitative or stages of development inside a given quality. We had to overcome the erroneous subjective idea that quantity (in this sense) meant numerical. In order to have internal cohesion in a process, quantity has to be the expression of qualitative motion. For example "life" is a quality that does not change or move. But inside the quality "life" is the quantity "generation." This quantity is in constant change and is the only way the quality is expressed. Therefore it cannot be numerical addition or subtraction. The process of a child becoming a youth has nothing to do with his or her size or weight but depends upon what stages of development the child goes through. This concept is fundamental to understanding motion. Consequently, it is fundamental to understanding the line of march of the revolution itself. Quantitative stages are knowable, and we must learn them in order to prepare for and utilize them. They are indispensable. It is clear that skipping a stage of development means the death of the process. From this we deduce that we must have political plans for each stage and not deal with stages in the future.

The process from one stage to another is motivated by the internal quantitative addition of the same quality. Let's take a look at industrial development. The assembly line was a quantitative development within the quality "industry." It did not change industry, but was a stage of development for that change. Or to go back to our child again. Passing from youth to manhood didn't end the quality "life," but it was a stage in preparing for that change. It is important to remember that quantitative changes come about from internal contradiction, contradictions that kick the process from one stage to the next.

The change in quality is brought about by the quantitative addition of an alien quality. The first stage of a new process is begun within the old as it reaches the end of its growth and before it leaves the scene.

It can be observed that there are a definite number of stages of growth of anything. What is not so easily seen is that each stage of growth (quantity) is also a stage in the preparation for change of quality. For example, the qualitative change in production from electro-mechanical to robotics started 150 years ago with the application of electricity to mechanical devices. At the end of the stages of development of electro-mechanics, the microchip was introduced which forced a leap from machinery guided and controlled by humans. To machinery guided and controlled by computers.

The transformation from one quality to another is by a sudden but sometimes prolonged leap wherein one quality is transformed into another.

THE APPLICATION OF THESE LAWS TO THE CHANGES TAKING PLACE IN SOCIETY

Basis and Superstructure

Before we can begin examining social change we should get some agreement on what and why and how society.

People don't just come together and agree to form a social order. Society has a base and is organized on that base. What is the base? The base of society is the unity of the mode of production and exchange, i.e. the productive relations and the productive forces. The base of the state is the productive relations. The base includes the way people relate to one another in the production of their lives and means of life. They do not relate to each other on just any old basis. They relate to one another through their mutual relation to property. So, it is how they define property that defines how they relate to one another and consequently what kind of society there is.

If human beings are defined as property, you have a slave society. If the land and factories and all the means of subsistence belong to private individuals, but the worker owns his or her ability to work, then you have capitalism. If all the means of existence are owned in common, used in common and the production distributed according to the needs of the individual, then you have a communal or communist society.

Now, let's approach this problem from another direction. The tools, the human muscle and intelligence that go into motion to create the things we live by are called the productive forces. It is clear that certain tools create a definite kind of working class. An

industrial plant creates an industrial working class just as hand tools create a manufacturing class. There is a unity between the tools and the class. Some revolutionaries become confused on this point and end up thinking that certain tools create a certain society or superstructure. It is true that some tools make slavery impossible, but none make it inevitable. Likewise, some tools make capitalism impossible, none make it inevitable. There is a difference between industry and capitalism. One is productive forces and the other productive relations. Both the Soviet Union and the United States were industrial countries, that is, they had approximately the same productive forces. They had opposite productive relations.

So, how do we set up a slave relationship? We organize ourselves and use superior force and violence to beat a group of people into submission. Now we have the problem of making the slave remain a slave. We start off by making laws about what a slave must and can't do. Then we arm a group of men to enforce these "laws." We set up whipping posts and jails and torture chambers. We teach the slave that God said that the slave must obey his master and get rewarded in heaven. We create institutions and a culture to stabilize our society so that the slave will remain a slave and we will remain the masters. These laws and institutions are called the superstructure. This superstructure reflects, protects, organizes and strengthens the base.

How the Base is Attacked

Everything that happens, happens at a certain time and under certain conditions. It should be clear that we couldn't use a slave to work in a factory with robots and computers. A slave cares nothing about and would destroy such instruments. Slavery is mostly associated with primitive agriculture and rudimentary heavy construction. This is heavy back-breaking, man-killing work that nobody wants to do. If such conditions exist then it is possible – not inevitable – to have slavery. But things change. Agriculture became mechanized. Heavy work such as construction was transformed by equipment that did the heavy work. As the conditions, especially the tools, changed, a new relationship struggled to be born. The base began to disintegrate, but the superstructure (the cops, courts, army, the government) would not allow change to take place.

How the Superstructure Is Destroyed

How new classes arise on the basis of new productive forces

This is how a revolutionary situation develops. New, more efficient tools are introduced. When we say efficient, we mean they can produce social wealth faster, cheaper and easier. A plow creates more wealth than a bow and arrow, so people took up the plow. New tools create a new class or classes. The plow doesn't create a landlord, but it does create a plowman or a farmer. New classes are qualitatively different. They don't fit and can't exist in the old relationship. They have to have and fight for a new productive relationship. We see in history that as people embraced agriculture, the productive relations of a tribal hunting and gathering society were abandoned and a massive and prolonged struggle erupted to create a new productive relationship based in agriculture.

Let's look at this in our world. The productive relations of capitalism is that the worker sells labor power to the capitalist and uses the money to buy back the necessities of life. Within this relationship, profit is realized. An aspect of this relationship is that everyone must have something to sell, and they must buy. The worker owns his labor power; the capitalist owns the factory. The worker sell labor power and buys commodities; the capitalist sells commodities and buys labor power. Now, along comes a more efficient means of production. These new means of production do not sell labor power. They just work. They are robots. Since the robot is so much more efficient than a worker and a machine, the worker cannot compete and there is no way to sell labor power except at the cost of robot power which is almost nothing.

We are seeing a new class coming into being because of the introduction of a new means of production. This new class is marginal or outside capitalist society. Already over 1/4th of the United States working class is temporary, part time or under minimum wage. A huge section is unemployed and destitute. World wide, a third of the work force is in poverty and 1-1/2 billion in destitution. The base of the capitalist system is disintegrating. Something has to give.

How they fight it out to establish new productive relations

People cannot fight the base. The relations of production isn't something you can lay your hands on. They fight the superstructure. They are somewhat used to doing that. They have always struggled to change or reform the superstructure, and that's what they do even when they are fighting for their lives and the superstructure can't be reformed any more.

They are fighting for the right to a cultured life. They did pretty good during the 1950's through the 1970's, and they try to go back to what was "good." They can't go back and they can't reform the superstructure. They have to overthrow it. They can't do that unless they have an idea of how to achieve their goals. In other words, there must be the introduction of new ideas based on the needs of the new class that arise from the new means of production.

This shift from reform to revolution, from one society to another, is referred to as "the leap."

The leap – sometimes a very long process – is the transition from one quality to another. Or to put it another way, it is the transition from one law system to another.

As with all motion, the leap does not begin as a slow quantitative moving away from the old. The leap is a sudden break in continuity.

As far as revolutionary work is concerned, what was the law system that governed our work during the period of capitalist stability? That law system could be summed up as this.

1. An exploited class cannot overthrow an exploiting class since they together make up the system. Their unending struggle is over the division of the social product and political liberties.
2. Since they cannot overthrow the system, the basic struggle of the masses led by the organized sector of the working class was to re form or restructure the system in favor of the people. These reforms or restructuring is society's recognition of quantitative changes

in the economic process that demand changes in the social process. Thus, all reforms are political and redefine the relations between classes.

By the middle 1980's we had taken the position that there were no more reforms left in capitalism. Although we did not clearly understand it, we knew that there were no more reforms because the quantitative introduction of qualitatively new means of production was stopping the development of the electro-mechanical means of production which was the basis for reform. The social expression of this was the emerging new class of proletarians who were outside the social system and whose needs could only be met through revolution.

At that point, the law processes based on the objective changes in the means of production came to an end and a new law system took over. We recognized this and responded by creating an organization of propagandists.

Why did we do this?

The struggle for reform is objective and occurs in all class societies. This objectivity dominates everything and the subjective side of the struggle must conform to it. Once reforms stop, the leap begins. Its first expression is the shifting from the objective to the subjective.

By its nature, the leap is governed by the subjective. It is not based in or governed by productive forces since the leap means transition. The leap in the productive forces is entirely objective and is well on its way to completion. Since there has been a qualitative leap in the productive forces there is bound to be a corresponding leap from one base to another. The resultant leap from one political base to another is entirely subjective. What kind of a society will there be? That depends on what you and the rest of the people understand about change.