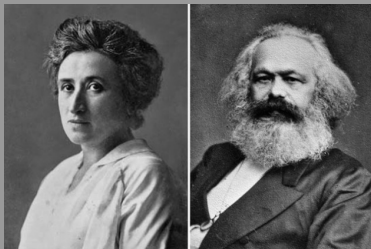


Marx and Luxemburg on capitalism and history

GV100 Class Slides: LT week 7

London School of Economics and Political Science



Questions/comments to start the class

Forces and relations of production

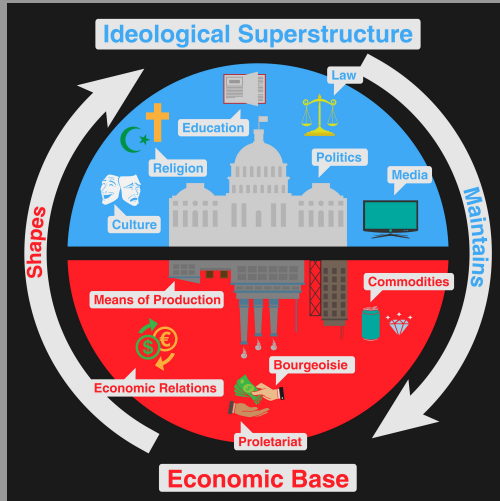
- **FORCES OF PRODUCTION:** These comprise (i) the means of production, i.e., tools and technology and (ii) labour power, including the skills and technical knowledge necessary to undertake particular tasks.
- **RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION:** These are the relations of economic power. For example, under capitalism capitalists have control over the means of production. The relations of production that prevail do so because they are the relations that best promote the further development of the forces of production. The sum total of relations of production constitute the economic structure of the society, which also gets called the 'base'.

Forces of production determine relations of production

“[This] passage presupposes that armies tend to maximise their destructive power, and to organise themselves to that end. [...] Suppose the army moves from rifles to machine-guns, and each machine-gun needs to be manned by three soldiers. Then it will now be efficient for the artillery to be divided into groups of three, each trio manning one gun, whereas before there was one man to each rifle, and no reason to group them in threes. There is a change in *technical organisation*. But it might bring about a change in *authority structure*. It might now be advisable to designate one man in each trio as a corporal, and to vest him with certain rights over the other two—with rifles there was no reason for the hierarchical distinction to cut so low. If corporals are appointed, the authority relations change in response to the development in the means of destruction, whose influence on the authority structure is mediated by the new technical relations those means require. The forces of destruction determine the technical organisation and thereby determine the authority structure”.

- Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, p.166.

Base and superstructure



The movement of history

Historical materialism has two central theses:

- 1 PRIMACY THESIS: The productive forces determine economic structures and economic structures determine the superstructure.
- 2 DEVELOPMENT THESIS: The productive forces tend to develop over time.

“The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord, the steam-mill gives you society with the industrial capitalist” (Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*).

“Thus the social relations within which individuals produce, the social relations of production, change, are transformed, with the change and development of the material means of production, the productive forces” (Marx, ‘Wage labour and capital’).

The end of capitalism

“The more productive capital grows, the more the division of labour and the application of machinery expands. The more the division of labour and the application of machinery expands, the more competition among the workers expands and the more their wages contract” (Marx, ‘Wage labour and capital’).

Luxemburg on Marx's analysis

QUESTION: What is the problem with assuming a 'closed system' in Marx's analysis of capitalism according to Luxemburg?

"Capital needs other races to exploit territories where the white man cannot work. It must be able to mobilise world labour power without restriction to utilise all productive forces on the globe... For the first genuinely capitalist branch of production, the English cotton industry, not only the Southern States of the American Union was essential, but also the millions of African Negroes who were shipped to America to provide the labour power for the plantations" (Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*).

Additional questions

- What is included in the superstructure? Is it just legal/political institutions or something more?
- Where does class fit into historical materialism? Can we do without class analysis?
- Why hasn't the revolution happened?
- Is Marx right that revolution is necessary, or would reform be enough?
- Any other questions you have!