Locke also has a principle - we should notice - which limits the volume of goods that may be accumulated to that quantity which can be properly used or disposed of. A person 'offended against the Law of Nature' if he allowed the things in his possession to spoil or perish 'without their due use' (25). What is the rationale of this provision, if not that the spoilage of goods is to be deplored just in case the needs or interests that some have in those goods remain unsatisfied? After all, decay is an integral part of natural cycles, and is hardly contrary to the 'Law of Nature' in itself. The rationale of the principle is surely that accumulation is to be limited by the consideration that none should be deprived, by the greed of others, of the means to satisfy their needs and legitimate interests. To take this seriously, however, is to leave liberalism far behind.

25 Locke, op. cit., Section 37.

Rousseau is a better guide than are the Libertarians to the moral status and implications of the institutions of private property:

The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying 'This is mine,' and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: 'Beware of listening to this imposter; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody (26).


Forces of Production and Relations of Production in Socialist Society

Sean Sayers

I Introduction

It seems evident that class differences and class struggle continue to exist in socialist societies; that is to say, in societies like the Soviet Union and China, which have undergone socialist revolutions and in which private property in the means of production has been largely abolished. I shall not attempt to prove this proposition here; rather it will form my starting point. For my purpose in this paper is to show how the phenomenon of class in socialist society can be understood and interpreted in Marxist terms; and, in particular, to explain and expound Mao Zedong's attempt to do so. For one of Mao's most striking and important contributions to Marxism was his recognition that 'contradictions among the people' continue to exist in socialist society, and his attempt to explain them within the theoretical framework of historical materialism.

Marx outlines his account of historical development in the following well-known words:

'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary it is their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or - what is merely a legal expression for the same thing - with the property relations within the framework of which they have hitherto operated. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. At that point an era of social revolution begins. With the change in the economic foundation the whole immense superstructure is more slowly or more rapidly transformed. (Marx, Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy)

It has been common to interpret these words as expressing a simple form of economic or even technological determinism which would rule out the very possibility of class divisions continuing to be a fundamental feature of socialist society. For, according to this account, a socialist society, by abolishing the private ownership of the means of production, thereby abolishes the material and economic basis of class differences; and so classes are destined to die out in socialist society as the forces of production are developed.

According to this interpretation, which I shall call
the 'traditional' account, in Marx's account of historical development all the emphasis is placed upon the development of the productive forces. These are regarded in merely technical and economic terms, as machinery and techniques, and looked upon as the sole dynamic element in historical change. As the productive forces develop in capitalist society and become more social in character, through the development of new machinery and new techniques, they come into conflict with the existing relations of production which are embodied, on this view, in the system of individual ownership. This contradiction is reflected in an intensifying class struggle, the outcome of which is ultimately socialism. With the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production, the relations of production are brought into harmony with the social character of the productive forces. The economic basis of class is thus, supposedly, abolished in socialist society and class struggle destined to die out.

Of course, it is not suggested that all class conflict immediately ceases after the expropriation of private property. On the contrary, as all Marxists recognise and as all historical experience shows, in the first period of socialism the new society has powerful enemies to contend with. Externally, the surrounding imperialist powers use all the means at their disposal, including armed intervention, to restore the old society. And there are internal enemies too: the expropriated classes, together with those who have lost power, privilege and position as a result of the overthrow of the old society, all seek to regain their old property and positions. They seek to frustrate, sabotage, destroy the new society - the present to overthrow it and to restore the old. Furthermore, the habits, customs, beliefs and attitudes of the old society are still active, and they continually hamper the development of the new.

Nevertheless, within the socialist society itself the material basis of class has, according to this account, been abolished. As the new society is consolidated and as it develops, old enemies become increasingly resigned and reconciled, and they die off. Old habits and attitudes should die out too, supposedly, they have no basis in the new society, except in the remaining areas of backward, small-scale, individual production. The major task for socialist society ceases to be the political one of class struggle, and becomes the purely economic and technical one of developing the productive forces, of modernising the economy. Thus, simply through the development of the productive forces under a socialist system of ownership, the old class distinctions are supposed to die out automatically, creating the conditions for 'the withering away of the state' and the transition to full communism.

By and large, this has been the official Soviet and Eastern European account of socialist society. However, the actual historical development of these societies manifestly contradicts the picture which this account presents. For, in fact, in the Soviet Union, in Eastern Europe and in all other socialist societies, class differences and increasing class conflict have become abundantly apparent, even to the casual observer. In the 60 years since the October Revolution, in a period when the productive power of Soviet society has developed gigantically, there has been no sign of class and class struggle automatically 'dying out', nor of the state 'withering away'.

It is sometimes said that Trotskyism recognises the continued existence of class conflict in socialist society and offers an alternative account of it in Marxist terms. But this is false. In the Soviet Union, it is said, a 'bureaucracy' has seized power from the proletariat, the revolution has been 'betrayed'; and the result is a monstrosity: neither a socialist society nor a capitalist one, but some new form inexplicable within the traditional framework of Marxist thought. In other words, Trotskyism abandons Marxism in its account of actually existing socialist societies. In fact, underlying most Trotskyist accounts of the Soviet Union, China and other historically existing socialist societies (none of which, needless to say, accord with the Trotskyite ideal), is the same traditional, mechanical and economicistic picture of Marxism (2). As we have seen, according to this view, the abolition of private ownership abolishes the economic basis of class. Therefore, the conflicts which Trotskyism correctly recognises to exist in socialist societies must be explained by it in other, non-Marxist, terms.

Trotskyism duly abandons the Marxist account of class, and talks instead of the ruling class of 'socialist' societies as a 'bureaucracy' - a group which is defined in purely political and social terms and not in the materialist terms of Marxism, not in terms of its relationship to the means of production.

If the traditional interpretation of Marxism were the correct one, then the continued existences of classes in socialist society would indeed constitute the 'refutation' of Marxism it is so often claimed to be by Marx's critics. In what follows, however, I want to try to show that Mao's work offers an important alternative interpretation of Marxism, and one which is able to account for classes in socialist society. For a fundamental aspect of Mao's understanding of socialism has been his insistence that class differences and class struggle continue to exist in socialist society. The abolition of private ownership of the means of production, he argues, is not alone a sufficient basis for the abolition of classes.

In China, although in the main socialist transformation has been completed with respect to the system of ownership, and although the large-scale and turbulent class struggles of the masses characteristic of the previous revolutionary periods has in the main come to an end... the class struggle is by no means over. The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie... will continue to be long and tortuous and at times will even become very acute. The proletariat is forced to transform the world according to its own world outlook, and so does the bourgeoisie. In this respect, the question of which will win out, socialism or capitalism, is still not really settled.

('On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People', p115)

Furthermore, according to Mao, socialist society can and must be analysed within the basic theoretical framework of historical materialism: The basic contradictions in socialist society are still those between the relations of production and the productive forces and between the superstructure and the economic base. (op. cit., p92)

2 A noteworthy exception to this generalisation is in C. J. Arthur's useful discussion of these issues in 'The Revolution Betrayed', Radical Philosophy 3, Winter 1972.
To see how these terms can be applied to socialist society it is essential to understand the Marxist account of the economic basis of society in a concrete and dialectical way. The productive forces and the relations of production must be seen as two contradictory aspects of a single totality: the productive activity of people in society. In particular, the relations of production must not be entirely reduced to the legal relation of ownership, nor must they be entirely abstracted from the forces of production. Furthermore, the forces of production must not be conceived simply as machinery and techniques, in abstraction from the relations of production. I will take each of these points in turn.

II The Relations of Production

The traditional interpretation of Marxism that I have just been considering tends to equate the relations of production with the legal system of ownership. Ownership is regarded, not as 'merely a legal expression' of the existing relations of production, but as their sole aspect. It is true, of course, that the acquisition of political power by the proletariat and the transformation of the system of ownership are the absolutely fundamental and necessary preconditions for the creation of a socialist society. However, it must be seen that the abolition of private ownership is the beginning and not the end of 'the epoch of social revolution' to which Marx refers (see above quote). The process of socialist revolution involves not just a change in the system of ownership, but also a thorough and total transformation of all aspects of the social relations of production and also of the 'whole immense superstructure'. In Marx's words:

Socialism is the declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transition point to the abolition of class distinctions generally, to the abolition of all the relationships of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionising of all the ideas that result from these social relations.

(The Class Struggles in France 1848-50, p223)

In other words, although ownership is indeed a vital and essential aspect of the concrete social relations which constitute the material basis of class distinctions, class and class struggle in society are not dependent upon this aspect alone. Class differences are embodied in all aspects of the social relations of production, as Lenin recognised when he wrote:

Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relations (in most cases fixed and formulated by law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and consequently by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. ('A Great Beginning', p486)

Socialism - the transition to classless society - must involve the transformation of all the aspects of the relations of production mentioned here by Lenin; not only a change in the system of ownership, but also a transformation of the relations of distribution and in the organisation and division of labour. These changes are fundamental and profound ones, and they will involve a long historical process. Until they are completed, social relations will continue to have class features in socialist society and class struggle will continue to exist. Such class struggle has a material basis within socialist society itself. Bourgeois forces continue to arise, not just because of external influences or of attitudes and habits from the past - they are continually engendered anew within socialist society, on the basis of bourgeois aspects of the relations of production which persist under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

The social basis of class cannot be understood merely as a matter of the ownership or non-ownership of the means of production. For this has the effect of isolating the legal system of ownership from the other aspects of the relations of production, which are its concrete conditions, and thus of making an abstraction of it. Marx, by contrast, sees property as a concrete social phenomenon:

In the real world ... the division of labour and all M. Proudhon's other categories are social relations forming in their entirety what is today known as property; outside these relations bourgeois property is nothing but a metaphysical or juristic illusion.

(Letter to P. V. Annenkov, 28 December 1846)

By the 'relations of production', therefore, Marx understands something more than mere ownership in its narrow, legal sense. What more? Mao, following Lenin as I have suggested, distinguishes two other aspects, besides the system of ownership, which go to make up the relations of production: (i) the system of distribution, and (ii) the social organisation and division of labour.

(a) Distribution

As regards the system of distribution in socialist society, it is impossible to live merely by ownership of the means of production. To live one must work, and one receives goods in proportion to the amount of one's work according to the principle, 'to each according to his work'. This represents a great advance in equality over the system of distribution in capitalist societies; and yet, as Marx emphasises in his Critique of the Gotha Programme, the principle of distribution in socialist society 'is still perpetually burdened with a bourgeois limitation' (p16) - it remains an imperfect and still transitional form.

Equal right here is still - in principle - bourgeois right... It recognizes no class differences, because everyone is only a worker like everyone else; but it tacitly recognizes unequal individual endowment and thus productive capacity of the worker as natural privileges... Further, one worker is married, another not; one has more children than another, and so on and so forth. Thus, with an equal performance of labour, and hence an equal share in the social consumption fund, one will in fact receive more than another, one will be richer than another, and so on... But these defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society.

(pp16-17)

Such 'defects' certainly exist in China. Although China is a remarkably egalitarian society by western standards, inequalities exist there, and it would be
utopian to imagine that things could be otherwise in a society at China's stage of historical development. The pertinent question to ask of a socialist society is not, 'Do inequalities exist in it?', for surely they will do; but rather, 'How are they being handled?', are they being diminished or increased? To what extent is the socialist principle of 'to each according to his work' actually realised? In this connection it is noteworthy that, by and large, China has not developed the rigid system of privileges and ranks so characteristic of the Soviet system. The overall tendency in China's socialist development has rather been towards a restriction of the class aspects of distribution and a closer and closer approximation to the socialist principle of distribution according to work (although, needless to say, progress in this direction has been uneven).

As the Soviet and Eastern European example so clearly shows, the continued restriction of inequalities in distribution is not an automatic product of socialist revolution; and yet, it is an important aspect of class division which must also be tackled in a socialist society if it is to continue to develop along the 'socialist road'.

(b) Social Organisation and Division of Labour

This is a further aspect of the relations of production in which class differences are embodied. For as Marx often stresses, class division in society is based also in the social organisation and division of labour, and, at the most fundamental level, in the division between mental and manual labour. Even more so than in the case of distribution, it is clear that a revolutionary transformation of the state and a change in the property system - profound as these changes are - will not immediately change the division of labour. The processes of production, like the tools and instruments of production, are inherited from the previous society and can be transformed only gradually, as the means of production are themselves transformed: this is the work of a whole historical epoch.

In the Soviet Union there has been little attempt to diminish the division between mental and manual labour. In China under Mao's leadership, by contrast, there has been a remarkable series of steps taken to diminish what the Chinese call 'The three great differences': the difference between industry and agriculture, between town and country, between mental and manual labour. These experiments and ideas have caught the imagination of people all over the world. Again, however, one must not be carried away by utopian dreams: it would be wrong to imagine that the division of labour has been, or could be, eliminated or even significantly transformed in a society at China's stage of development (3). The elimination of 'the three great differences' must needs be a long and gradual process, occupying the whole historical epoch of socialism.

(c) The Property System

A material basis for class distinctions does thus continue to exist in socialist society, even after the abolition of private property in the means of production. It continues to exist in the relations of production, which must be understood as comprising not just the system of ownership, but also that of distribution and of the division of labour. Indeed, these other aspects of the relations of production must be seen as the concrete basis and embodiment of the system of ownership, which is 'merely a legal expression' of them. And on closer scrutiny it becomes clear that even the system of ownership in the first stages of socialist society also has its 'differences' and 'defects'. Individual ownership of the means of production may all but be eliminated relatively rapidly, but a fully socialised property system cannot at once replace it. Collective property must continue to exist alongside state property ('property of the whole people'); and it is important to see that even the transformation of the system of ownership is completed only, as Mao says, 'in the main' (4).

Bettleheim's Account

The significance of the relations of production (beyond mere ownership) in understanding the Marxist account of class has also been strongly emphasized by a number of recent writers. In opposing the mechanical interpretation of Marxism, they have rightly stressed that the relations of production retain class features, and that a sphere of 'bourgeois right' continues to exist, even after private ownership has been abolished. However, it is equally important not to stress the role of the relations of production and of bourgeois right in a one-sided and exclusive way, and not to make abstractions of them. This can result in an equal and opposite distortion of Marxism: a voluntarist and idealist interpretation of Marxism in place of a mechanical one; a revisionism 'from the left', as opposed to the revisionism 'from the right' which I have so far been considering (5).

In opposition to both these alternatives, what needs stressing is that the material and economic base of class and class struggle cannot be found either in the productive forces alone, if these are viewed in

4 Bettleheim, I think, is guilty of such utopianism. In his Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organisation in China, written in 1971, he persistently talks as if the Chinese were not merely attempting to eliminate the division of labour within their factories, but had actually succeeded in doing so. Now that he has turned against the Chinese (see China After Mao, 1978), he blames them for not having done so. The error in both cases is the very idea that a society like China could possibly have achieved this.

5 There are interesting discussions of the significance of the continued existence of these two forms of property in J. V. Stalin, Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR, Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1972; and in Mao Tsetung, A Critique of Soviet Economics, trans. M. Roberts, Monthly Review Press, 1977. *
abstraction from the social relations of production, or in the social relations of production alone, if these are abstracted from the forces of production. No: the material basis of class struggle lies in the interaction, the concrete unity and contradiction, within the economic base, of the forces and relations of production. This is what Bettelheim is saying when he writes:

The field in which Lenin considered that 'the main features of what is most important, most fundamental, have not yet been completed' was that of 'the creation of the economic basis of the socialist system'. This was to be interpreted later as referring above all to the low level of the productive forces in Russia, from which it was deduced that the main thing was to 'build the material foundations' of socialism. There is no doubt that Lenin did have this aspect of the revolution's task in mind: it really is a task without which progress towards socialism is not possible. But when Lenin spoke of the 'economic basis' of socialism he did not have in mind only the development of the productive forces, but also, and especially, the socialist transformation of production relations. These are two associated tasks which have to be accomplished by the socialist revolution, two tasks which the Chinese Communist Party expresses in this concise formula: 'Grasp Revolution and Promote Production'. These two tasks are dialectically interconnected. They constitute two contradictory aspects of a single task.

(Class Struggles in the USSR: First Period 1917-23, p43)

Bettelheim has been prominent among those in the West who have recently tried to provide an analysis of class struggle in socialist society in Marxist terms. However, despite the clear statement of his just quoted, it seems to me that there is considerable confusion on this matter in his work. At other times (and, unfortunately, it must be said that these are more characteristic of his thought) he writes as if the development of the productive forces were entirely secondary to class struggle and to the relations of production. For example, in Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organisation in China, he writes,

In the combination productive forces/production relations, the latter play the dominant role by imposing the conditions under which the productive forces are reproduced. Conversely, the development of the productive forces never directly determines the transformation of the production relations; this transformation is always the focus of intervention by the contending classes - that is, of class struggle. The struggle for the socialist transformation of the production relations cannot be waged in the name of the 'development of the productive forces', since the forms this development assumes reflect class relationships and are determined by the class interests, perceptions, aspirations, and ideas of the contending classes.

(pp91-92)

Bettelheim is correct to oppose the traditional interpretation (which, following the Chinese, he calls the 'theory of productive forces'), with its abstract and one-sided emphasis on the role of the development of the productive forces in shaping history. But to oppose this theory with the opposite theory - which we could call the 'theory of production relations' - that the relations of production are always the principle aspect, is simply to embrace the opposite error. To isolate either the productive forces or the production relations, and to make either absolutely subordinate to the other, is to falsify the dialectical and concrete relation between them.

This is not to deny that in all contradictions there is a principal and a secondary aspect; but, as Mao says,

This situation is not static; the principal and the non-principal aspects of a contradiction transform themselves into each other and the nature of the thing changes accordingly.

('On Contradiction', p54)

And he goes on to say:

Some people think that this is not true of certain contradictions. For instance, in the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, the productive forces are the principal aspect; in the contradiction between theory and practice, practice is the principal aspect; in the contradiction between the economic base and the superstructure, the economic base is the principal aspect; and there is no change in their respective positions. This is the mechanical materialist conception, not the dialectical materialist conception. True, the productive forces, practice and the economic base generally play the principal and decisive role; whoever denies this is not a materialist. But it must also be admitted that in certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of production, theory and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role. When it is impossible for the productive forces to develop without a change in the relations of production, then the change in the relations of production plays the principal and decisive role... Are we going against materialism when we say this? No. The reason is that while we recognise that in the general development of history the material determines the mental and social being determines social consciousness, we also - and indeed must - recognise the reaction of mental on material things, of social consciousness on social being and of the superstructure on the economic base. This does not go against materialism; on the contrary, it avoids mechanical materialism and firmly upholds dialectical materialism.

(ibid, pp58-59)

What Mao is saying here is aimed primarily at the mechanistic 'theory of productive forces', but it surely applies with even greater force to the view that the relations of production always play the dominant role.

To ignore the influence of the forces of production in historical development and to imagine that the relations of production are always dominant is to stand things on their head - it is Idealism. Marx, by contrast, emphasises that the relations of production are themselves ultimately the product of the productive forces.

M. Proudhon the economist understands very well that men make cloth, linen and silk materials in definite relations of production. But what he has not understood is that these definite social relations are just as much
produced by men as linen, flax, etc. Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist. (Poverty of Philosophy, p95)

Of course, here as always, we must avoid giving a mechanistic interpretation to these words. It would certainly have been preferable if Marx had added the qualification 'in general' to this brilliantly striking aphorism. For if it is interpreted too narrowly it would appear to rule out the very possibility of socialist revolutions in relatively non-industrialised societies like Russia in 1917 and China even today, where small-scale production is still very widespread, particularly in agriculture. However, equally we must not deny the fundamental materialist truth which Marx is here stating: that the relations of production are, in general and ultimately, a product of the productive forces. The continued existence of small production does tend towards producing class relationships - the landlord and the peasant - and remains a gigantic force of backwardness in socialist society. As Lenin says, 'Small production engenders capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale' (Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder, p518). The consolidation and development of socialist social relations, the elimination of classes from society, absolutely requires the development of the productive forces and the elimination of such small production.

We must not make an abstraction of the relations of production, but regard them dialectically, as in concrete unity with the productive forces. Transformation of the relations of production and the development of the forces of production must necessarily go hand in hand. The relations of production comprise the sphere of Right, which Hegel regarded as the sphere of the Will (6). However, the sphere of Right and of the Will, isolated and abstracted from its material basis, is an illusion. The relations of production cannot simply be transformed at will. This is the error of Voluntarism. Bourgeois right cannot be restricted, nor can anything concrete be achieved, simply by being militant and having 'the correct line'. There are real, physical limitations, in the shape of the actually existing productive forces and the practical and economic necessities that they impose, which condition and contradict the political dynamic of the relations of production and of the will. Not to recognise this is to abandon materialism and to abandon the scientific in favour of the utopian approach to practical problems (7).

Why, then, does class struggle persist in socialist society? First of all, it is very important to see that the relations of production are not completely transformed with the abolition of private ownership and a development of the productive forces, as Bettelheim and others have rightly stressed. Nevertheless, we must go on to ask: Why must bourgeois relations of production and bourgeois right continue to exist in socialist society? What is the basis of their necessity? It is on these further questions that what Bettelheim has to say is far less satisfactory.

Marx explicitly addresses himself to the question of the continued existence of bourgeois right in the Critique of the Gotha Programme.

These defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society. Right can never by higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby. In a higher phase of communist society, after 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; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly - only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety...

(p17)

In other words, the restriction and abolition of bourgeois right is dependent both on the transformation of the relations of production and on the development of the productive forces.

Commenting on this passage, however, Bettelheim writes:

Everyone knows that Marx, in his Critique of the Gotha Programme, speaks of the 'bourgeois limitation' which affects the distribution of goods during 'the first phase of communist society'; however, this 'limitation' is not related to the level of the productive forces, but to 'the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour' and to the corresponding social relations which hinder the development of the productive forces.

(Class Struggles in USSR: First Period 1917-23, p52 note 37)

This is the very opposite of what Marx says. According to Bettelheim, the continuation of bourgeois right is 'not related to the level of the productive forces', whereas in this very passage Marx explicitly states the opposite: 'right can never be higher than the
productive force. In considering the productive forces, machinery and techniques must not be seen in isolation. A machine requires people to build, operate and maintain it - only in this context is it a productive force. In considering the productive forces of a society, it is therefore vital to recognise that these comprise not only machinery and techniques, but also people, with the necessary skills and organisation to operate them. Indeed, as Marx says, 'Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself' (Poverty of Philosophy, p151).

The creative initiative and energy of the working people is the most gigantic productive force. 'Of all things in the world, people are the most precious' said Mao. The traditional account of Marxism is blind to this, and to the fact that the working people themselves are a great productive force. It pictures the productive forces as merely machinery and techniques, and people as subordinated to them as their appendages. It is mechanistic and economistic. However, the development of the productive forces is not a merely economic and technical matter of modernising the processes of production. It is also, and equally importantly, a political process of mobilising and organising the energies and creativity of the people.

There is no greater force than the people, united politically, organised and mobilised. This has been demonstrated in China's recent history in remarkable ways, but none more striking than in the phenomenon of 'people's war', whose theory and practice were pioneered by Mao and the Chinese Communists in the 1930s and '40s. 'The Atom Bomb is a Paper Tiger,' said Mao in 1946. 'Of course, the atom bomb is a weapon of mass slaughter, but the outcome of a war is decided by the people, not by one or two new types of weapon... Take the case of China. We have only millet plus rifles to rely on, but history will finally prove that our millet plus rifles is more powerful than Chiang Kai-Shek's aeroplanes plus tanks.' ('Talk with the American Correspondent Anna Louise Strong', pp101-02)

And so history did prove, only three years later, with the victory of the Communist forces. More recently, the victory of the Vietnamese people against the might of US imperialism has demonstrated, even more decisively, that weapons and military technology are not the sole sources of military strength. On the contrary, according to Mao, 'the richest source of power to wage war lies in the masses of the people' (On Protracted War, p186); and he rejects the theory that 'weapons decide everything' as a mechanical approach to the question of war and a subjective and one-sided view. Our view is opposed to this; we see not only weapons but also people. Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things, that are decisive. The contest of strength is not only a contest of military and economic power, but also a contest of human power and morale. Military and economic power is necessarily wielded by people. (On Protracted War, p143)

The mechanical approach involves a blind faith in the intrinsic power of technology. In its account of the productive forces it puts a one-sided stress on the aspect of machinery and techniques. However, in rejecting this, we must again take care to avoid the equal and opposite errors of voluntarism and idealism. In emphasising the human factor, and the role of human initiative and creativity as productive forces, we must avoid doing so one-sidedly and making abstractions of them. For, like all human characteristics and features, initiative and creativity are themselves a product of human productive activity, which is based ultimately upon certain machinery and techniques. Without these people would no longer be people, and their creativity and initiative would be reduced to a sub-human level.

In this connection, it is important to see that when Mao says 'it is people not things that are decisive', he is not opposing people to things in an exclusive sense - he is not denying or negating the role of science or technology, for Marxism has nothing in common with the anti-scientific and anti-technological attitudes which have been so widespread in recent years; and what the Chinese people accomplished under Mao's leadership should not be mistaken for any sort of pre-industrial, rural utopia. On the contrary, as Engels says in his 'Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx': 'Science was for Marx an historically dynamic, revolutionary force.' And it is so, according to Marx, because it leads to the development of the productive forces, which brings them into contradiction with the existing relations of production; as the following, from Wilhelm Liebknecht's Reminiscences of Marx, illustrates: (Marx and Engels Through the Eyes of their Contemporaries, p51)

Of course these developments also have a negative side. Marx was perfectly aware that the introduction of new technology in capitalism has inhuman and destructive consequences. Indeed, no one has given
productive forces and the relations of production
The contradiction between the development of the
of the People's Paper':

in Hegel's words, grasps opposites 'in their unity'
of their role. This is the dialectical approach which,
the material basis of class struggle. According to

be a revolutionary one: the motor of history and
(Science of Logic, p56). Marx's use of this method is well illustrated in his remarkable little "Speech at the Anniversary of the People's Paper":
In our days everything seems pregnant with its contrary. Machinery, gifted with the wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labour, we behold starving and overworking it. The new-fangled sources of wealth, by some strange weird spell, are turned into sources of want. The victories of art seem bought by the loss of character. At the same pace that mankind masters nature, man seems to become enslaved to other men or to his own infamy. Even the pure light of science seems unable to shine but on the dark background of ignorance. All our invention and progress seem to result in endowing material forces with intellectual life, and in stultifying human life into a material force. This antagonism between modern industry and science on the one hand, modern misery and dissolution on the other hand; this antagonism between the productive powers and the social relations of our epoch is a fact, palpable, overwhelming, and not to be controverted. Some parties may wail over it; others may wish to get rid of modern arts in order to get rid of modern conflicts... On our part, we do not mistake the shape of the shrewd spirit that continues to mark all these contradictions. We know that to work well the new-fangled forces of society, they only want to be mastered by new-fangled men - and such are the working men. They are as much the invention of modern times as machinery itself. In the signs that bewilder the middle class, the aristocracy and the poor prophets of regression, we do recognise our brave friend, Robin Goodfellow, the old mole that can work in the earth so fast, that worthy pioneer - the Revolution.

(p359-60)
The contradiction between the development of the productive forces and the relations of production continues in the period of socialism; and it continues to be a revolutionary one: the motor of history and the material basis of class struggle. According to Mao, therefore, the revolutionary struggle must be continued even after a socialist society has been established, under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat; although, of course, the form and content of this struggle are changed. As Mao says, Contradictions in a socialist society are fundamentally different from those in the old societies, such as capitalist society. In capitalist society contradictions find expression in acute antagonisms and conflicts, in sharp class struggles; they cannot be resolved by the capitalist system itself and can only be resolved by socialist revolution... The case is different with contradictions in socialist society, where they are not antagonistic and can be resolved one after another by the socialist system itself.
('On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People', p92)
Contradictions among the people - class and class struggle - continue throughout the period of socialism and reflect the contradictions in the economic base between the forces and the relations of production. It is one of Mao's most important contributions to Marxism to have developed this theory for the first time in explicit and clear-cut terms.

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