

MARC LINDER
REIFICATION
AND THE
CONSCIOUSNESS
OF
THE CRITICS
OF
POLITICAL
ECONOMY

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STUDIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
MARX' THEORY OF VALUE

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INTRODUCTION

Rather than being a part of the political Economy of Socialism, this study understands itself as a contribution to the History of the political Economy of Socialism.¹ It will attempt to analyze the development of certain aspects of economic theory in several periods. In particular, for the Soviet Union and Cuba the author has tried to show the relation between this theory and the economic system arising in conjunction with it. The purpose of the paper is to provide part of the basis for understanding the development towards communism of the present socialist countries as well as the possibilities for socialist construction in societies still capitalist.

In this connection we must point out that in large part the analysis is conducted in terms of an immanent critique of the theories under review. This is particularly true of the second chapter devoted to Social Democracy. This emphasis is necessitated by what until recently has been an international discussion without the formal pre-requisite of a thorough knowledge of the important polemical positions throughout the development of the socialist societies.² Thus in large part this paper performs the very modest task of providing the

¹On the distinction see A. Pashkov, "Istoriia politicheskoy ekonomii sotsializma," EN, #12/1970, p. 80.

²A number of articles appearing in a periodically published department of the Soviet journal Ekonomicheskie nauki during the last decade may be regarded as a significant turn of events. These articles, referred to in footnotes in various places in the present work, mark the first serious effort to take account of the long unselfconscious tradition. In 1972 the first book-length publication of a collective working at Leningrad University appeared under the title Istoriia politicheskoy ekonomii sotsializma. In part written by the authors of the above-mentioned articles, this book doubtless represents a crucial step forward in the consolidation of the political

literary-historical foundations for a more concrete analysis.

But this is not the only reason for the emphasis on these theoretical-historical aspects; for although an attempt has been made to seek the roots of these theoretical developments in the development of capitalism itself, to search for a one to one correspondence between base and superstructure would be vulgar materialism.³ Marx' notions of base and superstructure find their specification in Capital with respect to the necessarily false consciousness caused by the forms assumed by societal production based on a certain level of the development of the forces of production. This is a general critique which is not class-specific; all social classes are subject to these "mystifications." Although the working class as a social-historical movement may be forced into seeing through these forms inasmuch as its life interests are perceived as threatened by capitalist production at a time when the material forces of production themselves would allow of a different arrangement of societal production,⁴ individual theoreticians of this working

Economy of Socialism. It certainly heralds the advent of a new stage in the development of the History of the Political Economy of Socialism. As an indication of the controversies surrounding the methodological structure of the book, see the unusually sharp criticism offered by Gertraud Wittenburg, "Ein bedeutender Beitrag zur Theorie der Geschichte der politischen Ökonomie des Sozialismus," Ww, XX/12 (December, 1972), 1876. The critic herself is one of several GDR authors who recently wrote doctoral dissertations on the subject; see G. Wittenburg, Die Entwicklung der Meinungen und Anschauungen sowjetischer Ökonomen über die politische Ökonomie des Sozialismus in den Jahren 1929-1945, Leipzig, 1972.

³ Cf., for example, Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie, MEW, XXI, 278ff.; Erich Hahn, Historischer Materialismus und marxistische Soziologie, Berlin, 1968, p. 118; S.L. Rubinshteyn, Bytie i soznanie, M., 1957.

⁴ For an example of the relation between the contradictions of capitalist production and the development of class struggle (in West Germany) see H. Funke, C. Neustuss, W. Semmler, and J. Hoffmann, "Intensivierung der Arbeit in der BRD und Gewerkschaften (II)," PdK, No. 5 (December, 1972), pp. 125-96.

class movement are no less subject to the "ideological" influences of capitalist production than are bourgeois authors.

Within this principled critique of forms of consciousness, of course, one must seek the causes of the development of new theories within various historical epochs of capitalism; one must also seek them in the interests of the various classes during various phases of class struggle. Such an "ideological critique" is of great importance; yet it must be admitted that the criteria for determining which particular interpretation of any ideological development is correct have not been systematically elaborated.⁵

To the extent that the deformation which Marx' theory of value underwent among the German Social Democrats, for instance, is related to the general phenomenon of revisionism, works which have dealt with this problematic supply valuable hints.⁶ It would seem however that the relative autonomy of theory assumes special significance within anti-capitalist movements after the propagation of Marx' theories had become widespread. This point is underscored when we consider that revisions of Marx' theory had their origins under Marx and Engels' own eyes; that is to say, in large part the problem is one of the reception of the theory itself. And if we cast a glance at the sorts of statements made by Marx and Engels to each other and others at the time, we do not find them to have engaged in very sophisticated "ideological critiques" of their pupils. Rather ignorance, lack

⁵We may refer to the divergent views over the years among Marxists concerning the causes of the rise of subjective value theory. See, for example, Rudolph Hilferding, Böhm-Bawerks Marx-Kritik, in Marx-Studien, I (Vienna, 1904); N. Bukharin, Politicheskaya ekonomiya rant'e (M., 1919); I. G. Bliumin, Sub'ektivnaya shkola v politicheskoy ekonomii, 2 vols., (M., 1928); Hermann Lehmann, Grenznutzentheorie (B., 1968).

⁶See the discussion of Karl Korsch's theses below, chap. 2, sect. B.1, and ch. 3, sect. B.1.

of dialectical training, etc., seem to play a large role.⁷

In other words, an intellectual problem lay before them which had to be dealt with by means of scientific teaching. Without falling into misplaced hero worship; if we are to take Engels' remarks concerning Marx' unique suitability to writing Capital seriously,⁸ then it is hardly surprising that his followers did not always stand on the same plane of intellectual insight as Marx. The rather ossified reception accorded Marx even among Marxists remains an unsolved problem which this author does not pretend to have disposed of. In part this tradition doubtless originated in the great intellectual barriers posed by Marx' method and mode of presentation; after all, Marx himself noted in the "Foreward" to the first edition of Capital that the section on the value forms was the most difficult to understand.⁹ It does not seem an exaggeration to state that Marx not only presupposed readers who wanted to "learn something new,"¹⁰ but also that, despite repeated suggestions by Engels to modify the dialectical formulations, Marx was apparently incapable of imagining readers who could not think dialectically.¹¹

⁷ See, for instance, Marx' letters to L. Kugelmann concerning W. Liebknecht, 6 April 1868 and 24 June 1868, in MEW, XXII, 543, 548. See also Franz Mehring, Karl Marx: Geschichte seines Lebens, in Gesammelte Werke, III (Berlin, 1962), 506-13.

⁸ See Engels' "Karl Marx, 'Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie,'" MEW, XIII, 474.

⁹ MEW, XXIII, 11f.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See the following Marx-Engels correspondence: Engels to Marx, 9 April 1858, MEW, XXIX, 319; Engels to Marx, 16 June 1867; Marx to Engels, 22 June 1867; Engels to Marx, 24 June 1867; Engels to Marx, 26 June 1867; Marx to Engels, 27 June 1867; Marx to Engels, 27 June 1867, MEW, XXXI, 303-17.

According to an important Soviet textbook;

If ideas correspond to the ripening needs of societal life, then sooner or later they will find access to the consciousness of the broad masses, they will become the latter's own ideas and unite them in one mighty army inspired with a unified goal and will.¹²

With respect to Marx' theory of value one might have to conjecture that it has still not gripped the masses. That it enter mass consciousness is neither necessary nor probable in the course of an anti-capitalist revolution; for the concrete phenomena of commodity production on the surface of capitalism which express the relations of class exploitation can be mediated to the working class without the complete apparatus of the value form analysis. As Rosa Luxemburg pointed out on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Marx' death:

Thus the social conditions of existence of the proletariat in present day society, theoretically uncovered by Marx, wreak their vengeance on the fate of Marxist theory itself. An incomparable instrument of intellectual culture, it lies fallow because it is useless for bourgeois class culture, greatly transcends the needs of the working class for weapons of struggle. And it is only with the liberation of the working class from its present conditions of existence that, together with other means of production, also Marx' method of research will be socialized....¹³

The situation changes, however, during the period of socialist and communist construction when conscious control of social reproduction by the mass of the working people must become a driving subjective motor of development. Whereas critics of

¹²O. V. Kuusinen, Osnovy marksizma-leninizma (M., 1960), pp. 141f.

¹³"Stillstand und Fortschritt des Marxismus," Gesammelte Werke, I:2 (B., 1970), 368.

political economy fulfil a basically analytical role under capitalism insofar as they may serve in revolutionary parties or trade unions, they must assume a much more active and immediate function during the transition period to socialism and the period of socialist construction. These two situations must not be understood as rigid opposites: passive contemplation in capitalism and direct action in the post-capitalist period; for in none of these societies does the critic of political economy exercise direct control--albeit for different reasons.

That is to say, under capitalist production working class organizations have little or no decision-making control over production. (In another sense neither do capitalist organizations--namely that there is no aggregate decision-making.) Their intervention is fundamentally of a defensive nature with respect to the sphere of distribution (wages) and working conditions ("trespassing on management prerogatives"); or, alternatively, in a revolutionary situation they may attempt to overthrow the mode of production altogether. But this latter event is hardly a constituent part of the process of self-reproduction of capital. Under these circumstances a critic of political economy may provide significant information based on theoretical insights to trade unions and to revolutionary political parties necessary for the latter to determine their policies at any given time.¹⁴

In a socialist society, on the other hand, the responsibility for the entire economic process falls to the working class--indeed, in a comprehensive manner not known in any capitalist society. Yet the Political Economy of Socialism is not identical with planning; or rather, the critics of political economy are not identical with the planners. Particularly in the period

¹⁴ Cf. the interesting account of prognoses in capitalism given by Jürgen Kuczynski, Propheten der Wirtschaft (B., 1970), chs. 3 and 4.

before the consolidation of the higher stage of communism the critics of political economy are engaged not only in the positive task of constructing a new social formation; they must also perform the equally crucial task of educating the increasingly decisive consciousness of the working class with respect to certain aggregate societal issues which might still easily escape individual workers at a time when remnants of capitalist production prevent them from acquiring the aggregate social view needed for making comprehensive plans. Such remnants include above all: 1) a sufficiently long working day to prevent them from devoting the requisite time to theoretical and general informational activities; and 2) a specific sort of division of labor which not only restricts workers to one or a very few productive activities, but for the most part is still embedded in a structure of social production characterized by a division between the individual labor functions and the aggregate planning at a plant or total social level.

Thus the critics of political economy have the responsibility of examining whether the overall development of socialist construction tends in the direction of eliminating those forms of social production under capitalism which caused the latter to cease being a progressive mode of production at a certain level of the development of the forces of production. (It must be observed that no independent, "free lance," responsibilities are being ascribed to the critics of political economy as a separate grouping. These responsibilities may be understood as part of the general leadership and educational activity of a revolutionary organization.)

It is here then that the legacy of an incorrect reception of Marx' theory may assert itself; for if the destruction of commodity-capitalist society is not an automatic process, but rather one that demands conscious guidance, incorrect guidance

may lead to the preservation of old relations. In his seminal essay "Die Verdinglichung und das Bewusstsein des Proletariats" G. Lukács remarked that it was not his task to pursue the consequences of the non-recognition of the nature of the commodity structure of capitalism for the development of Marxist political economy:

How central this way of putting the question has become for economics itself, what consequences the leaving of this methodical point of departure for the economic views of vulgar-Marxism has brought on, is not to be examined here.¹⁵

Our study may be considered a small start in the direction of uncovering precisely these consequences.

We may specify the constrictions which underlie the scope of this study. These refer to the circumstance that concentration on the critics of political economy reflects the important yet circumscribed role occupied by them in the socialist division of labor. To the extent that they execute a considerable portion of the general supervisory activities--especially during the transition period to socialism when these activities are associated with a relatively autonomous sector of the division of labor--these political economists have definitely gained importance out of proportion with their numbers. But their role is a contradictory one insofar as they are part of the first self-consciously self-liquidating intelligentsia in history; for the success of their own efforts is expressed among other things in the tendential elimination of the foundations of the separation between manual and mental labor.

This study sets itself the rather circumscribed task of tracing the value-theoretical foundations of contemporary socialist societies. Inherent in Marx' analysis of the capitalist

¹⁵Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein (B., 1923), pp. 94f.

mode of production is the twofold nature of the subject matter; this duality is expressed in the double meaning of the subtitle of Capital; Critique of Political Economy. Political Economy here signifies: 1) the specific relations under which members of bourgeois society produce and reproduce their lives; and 2) the scientific investigation of these relations.¹⁶ Inasmuch as the present socialist societies have declared the need for, and have begun to develop, a Political Economy of Socialism to study the socialist mode of production, these societies may be approached in accordance with Marx' understanding of the two-fold nature of the Critique of Political Economy; namely they may be studied from the point of view of their real development and of the development of the science devoted to investigating these societies.

The present study is further limited in the following manner. First of all, we are restricting ourselves to a presentation of the foundations of Marx' theory of value without pursuing its elaboration in Marx' analysis of capitalist production. Correspondingly, the authors under review we examine with respect to their understanding of these foundations; at times allusions are made to the consequences which this understanding has had for their concrete analyses of capitalism. (The reader is referred to other works which offer a critique of these concrete analyses to the extent that they are available.)

¹⁶ See Marx' comment on the development of the thought process concerning value theory in his letter to L. Kugelmann, 11 July 1868, MEW, XXXII, 553; see also Lukács, op. cit., p. 47; and Jindřich Zelený, Die Wissenschaftslogik bei Marx und "Das Kapital", trans. P. Bollhagen (B., 1968), pp. 52f. Since Zelený will be cited often and since the present author does not agree with certain parts of Zelený's book dealing with matter of peripheral relevance to the discussion here, we refer the reader to a review article by the present author in Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung, Sonderheft 2 (October, 1969), pp. 82-84; see also the review by W. Müller in SoPo, #1 (April, 1969), pp. 66-69; and I.N. Morshantsev, "Ob osnovakh nauchnogo metoda poznaniia," Filosofskie nauki, #4/1971, pp. 159-61.

In a sense, this reduces the present study to a quasi-formal approach inasmuch as the substance of these analyses does not emerge until more concrete studies are undertaken. Yet the persistent and almost perverse misunderstanding of Marx' theory of value has proved to be so striking, even among Marxists, that this approach assumes a more than formal significance.

The "rationale" for restricting ourselves to value theory derives from the general orientation of this work towards providing the literary-historical basis for more concrete studies of contemporary socialist societies. Since value theory formed the methodological starting point of the classical political economy of which Capital is the critique, this also becomes the methodological foundation of Capital insofar as value (or the commodity as the contradictory whole of value and use value) is the elementary pre-condition for developing the concept of the dominant relation in the capitalist mode of production--capital.

The same reasoning applies, mutatis mutandis, for retaining value theory as the methodological foundation of a study of the transformation of capitalist relations into socialist relations.

Thus the purpose of the first chapter is to acquaint the reader with Marx' theory of value as well as with his conception of the transformation of value relations in post-capitalist society.

The second chapter deals with the development which Marx' theory of value underwent during the period of the Second International as well as among several of the latter's important representative theoretical successors; the latter will be particularly relevant because they play a key role in shaping contemporary discussions of socialism taking place on the Left in capitalist countries.

Then in the third chapter we turn to the rise of the first society in which the conditions of capitalist-commodity production could be eliminated: the Soviet Union. Chronologically we have

limited our framework to the first decade after the October Revolution. The reasons for this time span are several. First, it concentrates attention on the transition period as a problematic in itself; that is, that complex of problems which arises as a result of the contradictory elements at work during the period in which one mode of production is consciously transformed into another. Although this transition period has some features in common with previous transition periods, the element of consciousness distinguishes it from the latter and hence renders inadequate the mechanical schemata of the developmental stages of history which Marxism has often been caricatured as. This particular transition period, however, assumes uniqueness as the first socialist transition and thus contains within itself the possibilities of inventiveness but also the dangers of ignorance.

Lest it be thought that precisely this uniqueness would make the period inappropriate as a point of departure for understanding contemporary socialist societies, we must emphasize the second reason for our chronological limitation: namely that this period in its theoretical and practical creations provided--even if only in a negative fashion--crucial experience for later periods. This is true not only for the subsequent development within the Soviet Union, but also for transition periods in other countries. This means that the evolution of the Soviet economic structure as well as of what has come to be known as the Political Economy of Socialism received essential impulses from this period. Similarly, although the peculiar historical-social situation surrounding any other transition period will diverge from that in the Soviet Union, the practical and theoretical experience of this first transition has become a significant real factor elsewhere.

This latter circumstance leads us to the fourth chapter in which the transition from capitalism to socialism under conditions differing radically from those in the Soviet Union is viewed.

Thus, by examining the first decade of development in Cuba we perform the second of the two tasks just mentioned; namely, we observe the influence of the history of the first socialist society upon another. By omitting the first task, however--that of conducting an analysis of the elaboration of Soviet economic theory and practice until the present day--we would appear to be neglecting an important link. For it must be obvious that neither theoretical discussions nor policy nor reality in Cuba has merely resumed the level of development attained in the Soviet Union toward the end of the 1920s without having been influenced by intervening developments.

It is, then, not in this sense that the juxtaposition of the Soviet Union and Cuba is meant; that is, no parallels or invidious comparisons are sought. Ideally, of course, a more precise analysis of Cuba would presuppose a thorough working up and evaluation of the experiences of the thirteen socialist societies preceding it. On the other hand, since the History of the Political Economy of Socialism is still in its inception more than a half-century after the October Revolution, the scientific apparatus for such an undertaking is lacking. But to pursue the further development of these societies in the depth which characterizes the third chapter would have led to unwieldy length.

The possible implications of the Cuban Revolution for other societies, however, have become so significant that it now appears inappropriate to await the results of a research process which will doubtless claim years. For this reason it was decided that it would be more useful at the present time to try to come to some tentative judgment concerning the extent to which the Cuban Revolution has enriched socialist theory and practice. In order to bridge the chronological gap between the two main periods under discussion, we have chosen to make reference in the footnotes

to the literature marking the various stages through which the various problematics have gone as well as to more recent evaluative and summary literature.

The difficulties just recounted with respect to the present state of research point up the need to advert again to the relative paucity of historicity which had characterized the study of the political economy of socialism until very recently. One GDR economist has attempted to formulate the need for overcoming this tendency in the following manner:

Every science must begin--if it wishes to be on a level with the tasks intended for it--at a certain point of its development to explore its own history. This is also valid for the political economy of socialism. Socialism and its economic-theoretical analysis have today, fifty-five years after the victorious October Revolution, reached a state where the new questions of the step by step construction of communism in the Soviet Union, of the erection of the mature, developed socialist society in the brother countries and the complicated problems of the transition of further countries to socialist revolution must be explored and answered theoretically. Only in this way can the character of our social epoch be comprehended from the economic-theoretical viewpoint. It is therefore not at all a coincidence that Marxist political economists...are intensively devoting themselves to theoretical-historical research in the field of the political economy of socialism.¹⁷

This interpretation should not be interpreted to mean that previously the historical development of the political economy of socialism has been neglected. The numerous debates which have taken place over the years have consisted largely in adopting positions in defense of or in opposition to older

¹⁷ Helmut Seifert, "Zur Geschichte der politischen Ökonomie des Sozialismus als Wissenschaft," Ww, XX/11 (November, 1972), 1605.

theories. But these debates were usually of a punctual nature; that is to say, they were usually restricted to isolated aspects and thus did not foster a consciousness of the history of these discussions.

This procedure was at least in part dictated by the obvious fact that a certain amount of time must pass before consciousness of the problematic can develop. If for no subjective reasons, this "lag" had to arise because the problematic itself did not develop immediately. In fact, it was not until rather recently that it was unambiguously established "that socialism is not a short-term transition phase in the development of society, but rather a relatively autonomous social-economic formation in the historical epoch of the transition from capitalism to communism on a world scale."¹⁸ From this statement it is clear that until socialism had emerged as an autonomous mode of production it was not possible to develop a consciousness of the problematic of the need to develop a science to study that formation or even of the circumstance that such a science was embryonically evolving.¹⁹ As long as the view was maintained that the transition to communism would be a relatively short period, and that the lower stage of communism would not be characterized by commodity

¹⁸ W. Ulbricht, Die Bedeutung des Werkes "Das Kapital" von Karl Marx für die Schaffung des entwickelten gesellschaftlichen Systems des Sozialismus in der DDR und den Kampf gegen das staatsmonopolistische Herrschaftssystem in Westdeutschland (B., 1967), p. 38.

¹⁹ For this reason we cannot agree with one of the editors of the first History of the Political Economy of Socialism, D. K. Trifonov, that the "foundations of the Political Economy of Socialism were given by K. Marx, F. Engels and especially by V. I. Lenin in their immortal works." See Istoriia politicheskoy ekonomii sotsializma (In., 1972), p. 4.).

production, there was no basis for the creation of a science for which no subject matter existed. As the editorial board of the main economic journal of the GDR recently explained with respect to the Soviet Union during the 1920s:

It was however not immediately recognized that also in socialism with its industrial large-scale production, with the complicated unity of national and international interests, with the dialectic of present possibilities and future wishes, etc., the economic regularities and that which is essential in economic relations do not appear directly, immediately and obviously to all on the surface of societal life. Even in socialist society there is the difference between essence and appearance, between form and content, between quantity and quality--and here too there is need for science to reveal the essence of things beneath the surface, to detect the content behind the external phenomenal forms and the real quality of economic regularities and processes.²⁰

We must conclude, then, that the very existence of a Political Economy of Socialism involves the concomitant affirmation of the existence of socialism as an autonomous mode of production. This parallel relation between science and real subject matter poses important problem complexes for us in this connection. The first deals with the internal development of a socialist scientific discipline and the second with the peculiar relation between socialist theory and practice.

The former question we will examine here only within the context of the history of such a discipline. Above we mentioned the lack of historical consciousness in the past among those responsible for the "preservation and cultivation of the scientific heritage."²¹ This approach did not express itself in a nihilistic

²⁰"50 Jahre UdSSR--50 Jahre Geschichte der politischen Ökonomie des Sozialismus," WZ, XX/11 (November, 1972), 1603. Cf. the remark by Harry Nick to the effect that the major defect of the Political Economy of Socialism until recently had been that "the positive functions of commodity production and of material interestedness...were not logically and stringently integrated into the edifice of the economic theory." Gesellschaft und Betrieb im Sozialismus (B., 1970), p. 80.

²¹Seifert, op. cit., p. 1609.

attitude towards all previous theorizing insofar as the latter was declared to be false; on the contrary, extremely intense debates centered precisely on such views. Nor may the currently emerging historical point of view merely consist in "relativizing" theories in accordance with the circumstances under which they evolved.²² If one determines "the principle of historicism" in terms of such research guiding criteria as whether any particular theory represents the further development of already existing correct views and/or reflects the natural-historical process of the formation of a mode of production,²³ then one becomes exposed to two dangers.

First, the possibility arises that no substantive criteria exist to determine what are correct views other than the socially accepted ones at any given time. Historicism then may be reduced to interpreting the past exclusively in the light of current views. This means that although at any given time views of the past may be characterized as correct, the possibility is not incorporated into the theoretical framework that the current standards are incorrect--or even that they will be proved incorrect in the future.

The second danger also leads us back to the second problem complex mentioned above--namely, the relation between socialist theory and practice. The development of the latter cannot be reduced to the same sort of natural-historical processes which Marx discovered for capitalism without extinguishing the essential distinctions between that society and post-capitalist society. If the development of communism is equivalent to the closing of

²² Istoriia politicheskoy ekonomii sotsializma, op. cit.,
p. 6.

²³ Op. cit., pp. 6, 8.

the prehistory of human society, then this feature must be built into the construction of socialism and communism as a tendency. This means that with the possibility of withdrawing human development from what has hitherto been a sphere of "Naturwüchsigkeit,"²⁴ consciousness assumes significance of a new quality in spite of the continued existence of "laws of nature" with respect to the reproduction of daily life.²⁵ Thus as soon as human beings have created the conditions for a society in which they can actively intervene and shape the course of history under conditions increasingly chosen by them, it does violence to reality to continue to apply the schemata of Zwangsläufigkeit which dominate capitalist society. Once a "policy decision" has been made, for example, that such and such structural changes must be introduced in order to accommodate socialist society to the existence of (a new type of) commodity production--the latter being a situation which is supposed to exist independently of the will of man--, then the modifications effected by this policy cannot be regarded from the same point of view which served as a starting point for the analysis of capitalism.

Furthermore, that commodity production must exist is both a theoretical statement which must be judged on its own grounds and an empirical one. But on both accounts the statement presupposes a certain understanding of the causes of commodity production.

More importantly, the policies themselves which are undertaken in order to accommodate socialist society to these "natural necessities" may lead to a slowing down or accelerating of the elimination of commodity production. It is here that the active, intervening element comes to the fore and the element of

²⁴ Marx and Engels, Die deutsche Ideologie, MEW, III, 70.

²⁵ On "laws of nature" see the discussion of the content of the law of value in chap. 1.

Naturwuchsigkeit may degenerate into a justification of a policy existing at any time.

As an example we may take the above-mentioned editorial from Wirtschaftswissenschaft which contends that on the basis of Lenin's insight into the incompatibility of the available developmental level of the forces of production and the principle of distribution according to ability with direct product exchange and the elimination of trade and money, Lenin concluded that labor expenditures would still have to be compared in value:

Therewith such categories as commodity and value, money and profit received their new social content on the new foundation of the socialist system. Therewith Lenin created the theoretical and economic policy foundations of the political economy of socialism as a new scientific discipline with its own subject matter and autonomous theoretical structure.²⁶

At this point we are not interested in the substantive merit of this thesis: this we leave to chapter 3. Rather, we focus here on the underlying methodology. When the editorial states that "therewith" the categories of commodity and value, etc., received new social content, this suggests the following textual interpretation: with Lenin's analysis or conclusion this new social content arose. Formally this would be tantamount to saying that with the writing of Capital these same categories assumed a new social content within capitalism. Obviously, this analogy would be rejected by the authors of the editorial since the objectivity and concrete manifoldness of these categories existed independently of their being discovered by Marx.

Hence the authors must mean something else. Since they refer to Lenin's analysis as a "historical landmark in the development of socialist theory and practice,"²⁷ we may reasonably

²⁶ Op. cit., p. 1603.

²⁷ Ibid.

infer that it is this relation between theory and practice that plays a new role in the creation of the "new foundation of the socialist system"; in other words, Lenin's theory created the basis for an economic policy which itself was instrumental in lending these categories new social content. This means that for the first time society can planfully intervene into the value producing foundations of social production in an attempt to eliminate value production.²⁸

But to the extent that this happens, the Zwangsläufigkeit and Naturwuchsigkeit common to capitalist commodity production begin to break down; and the theory and practice which guide this direct intervention become directly criticizable in a way which differs essentially from the critique of objective reality itself under capitalist commodity production.

When the editorial goes on to state in the second part of the passage cited above that Lenin "therewith" created the foundations of a new "scientific discipline with its own subject matter," it is basing this on a historical judgment of what in fact Lenin did rather than what Lenin himself purported to be doing. Again leaving the content to chapter 3, we merely point out here that ascribing to Lenin this achievement presupposes that he had already anticipated the subsequent position according to which socialism is a relatively autonomous mode of production. To reconstruct the History of the Political Economy of Socialism in such a manner as to incorporate certain theories into--let alone to characterize them as foundations of--a subsequent theoretical

²⁸ For the sake of avoiding misunderstandings; according to some Marxist positions value is modified by state intervention during the period of state monopoly capitalism. Regardless of the correctness or falsity of this thesis, it is clear that the state even in this conception is not consciously coming to grips with value inasmuch as bourgeois economists do not recognize the existence of objective value in the Marxist sense.

structure presupposes a certain relation of theory to practice which may or may not obtain in socialist society.

More specifically, although it may be permissible to detect the origins of value theory in pre-capitalist societies or in the early period of capitalism before value production had taken possession of the economic structure insofar as incipient commodity production or circulation takes place in such societies, this approach is no longer fully applicable in a socialist society. The reason for this methodological difference lies in the circumstance that, whereas the grasping of the nature of value production (within the limits of bourgeois economics or not) is irrelevant for the actions of the dominant production agents in capitalism, it ceases to be in socialism. The formulation of these is here not only the reflection of reality; it is itself a qualitatively new aspect of reality. Thus to find a forerunner or rather a founder of the political Economy of Socialism in Lenin presupposes that Lenin contributed to the construction of the real foundations of an autonomous socialist mode of production. If this should prove not to be the case, then the co-optation of Lenin for a later tendency would represent a violation of the "principle of historicism."

Since we are not of the opinion that socialism has reached a stage of development which would permit of conceptualization as a mode of production, we do not consider it possible at this time to define unambiguously all the aspects of the Soviet period in the 1920s, for example, in terms of the self-image of contemporary Soviet society. Since, moreover, the current state of research also does not conduce to making historically well-founded generalizations, our approach will limit itself to crystallizing out what appeared to be the most significant positions of the periods under review.