

To Feudalism

A product, in its most basic form, is the object of the result of labor. The product predates a commodity in the capitalist mode of production, and it predates the feudal mode of production, and it predates the "ancient communal" mode of production of slavery. To put it simply, production is a defining characteristic or feature of humanity as it is seen in its earliest stages, (where the most advanced forces of production consisted of the basic raw materials found in the environment, stones and twigs, and humans were sustained by the capture of game or of the uprooting of plants and picking of berries, making for a very limited ability of human labor.)[1]

As man's practical or perceptual knowledge grew, so did his theoretical. "As social practice continues," Mao writes (in his essay On Practice), "things that give rise to man's sense perceptions and impressions in the course of his practice are repeated many times; then a sudden change (leap) takes place in the brain in the process of cognition, and concepts are formed." This process of knowledge allowed the further evolution of the forces of production, as better means of production led to better materials which could then be made into better means of production. After an eventual quantitative development occurred enough to produce an antagonism or struggle between the potential forces of production and the existing relations of production, that is an antagonism or struggle between the new and the old, the dialectic is resolved when one transforms into the other, when the relations of production become new and the forces of production become old.

This substantial change is also characterized by the change of the products created. For example, (the ability to create more advanced stone tools, then the ability to create the necessary tools for iron and bronze production giving way to iron and bronze tools.)[2] Furthermore, with the means of subsistence requiring less and less human labor-power, man's free time dramatically increased, giving way for the expressions of the economic base in the forms of science, art, mathematics, religion, literature and all aspects of human creativity and of human genesis. It is a mistake, however, to assume that these expressions of the base, determined by the base, cannot in turn affect the base. In his Marx's Concept of Man, Erich Fromm notes that "science itself and all powers inherent in man are part of the productive forces which interact with the forces of nature...not only do circumstances make man; man also makes circumstances." This relationship is known as the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure. As an example, the caste system found in India does not define the division of labor between castes, rather the caste system exists to explain the division of labor between castes, and in turn has affected the division of labor. This idea of each opposite or pole of a contradiction transforming into each other was established and exemplified by Mao: "All contradictory things are interconnected; not only do they coexist in a single entity in given conditions, but in other given conditions, they also transform themselves into each other."¹

As we shape the world, the world shapes us; as long as we continue to produce our own material life and means of subsistence, we will advance ideologically, our

¹ Mao, "On Contradiction," *Marxists Internet Archive*, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_17.htm.

governments will change, our understanding of the sciences will change, the progress of art will continue, and the material conditions that shape our ideas will manifest themselves as the primary, and man becomes what man made the world to be. For humans are only human insofar as they are active and productive.

The transformation of the relations of production from hunter-gatherer society to agricultural slave-owning society was the first of many dramatic changes of society. As Marx noted in The German Ideology, this "proceeds especially from the union of several tribes into a city by agreement or by conquest," and that "the antagonism of town and country; later the antagonism between those states which represent town interests and those which represent country interests, and inside the towns themselves the antagonism between industry and maritime commerce." Since war of tribes in primitive society established the cultural conditions to allow slavery to be acceptable, slaves begin to become the dominant force of production to support an ever-increasing biomass, as well as a surplus of food. This becomes the basis for division of labor between "town and country", or craft-work and agricultural work. Eventually, within towns an antagonism forms between "industry and maritime" commerce. The first maritime empires are therefore slave-owning ones.

What leads to these labor divisions? The division between agriculture and craft is evidently due to the food surplus generated by agriculture. Food surplus allows some to not directly produce their own means of subsistence, rather rely on other individuals for subsistence. This is what Marx means by "the existing stage in the division of labour determines also the relations of individuals to one another."² This interdependency allows specialization away from agriculture, as the craftworkers now no longer spend time in the fields, demonstrating an advance in the means of production. It is this advancement which, through this continued division and specialization, leads to the diversity of work which is done, increasing the creative expression of society. Thus a change in the relations of production does affect society, and the relations of individuals to each other.

An unfortunate consequence of this is the progression of the emergence of class. "The relative position of these individual groups is determined by the methods employed in agriculture, industry and commerce (patriarchalism, slavery, estates, classes),"³ writes Marx. How exactly does this arise? There must not be simply a food surplus, allowing subsistence of those who do not work, or do not do agricultural work, but also there must be a monopolization of the means of production or ownership and control of those who own the means of production. "It is the communal private property which compels the active citizens to remain in this spontaneously derived form of association over against their slaves."⁴

Marx argues that "the antagonism between town and country begins with the transition from barbarism to civilisation, from tribe to State, from locality to nation, and

² Marx, Karl, and Engels, Frederick, "The German Ideology," *Marxists Internet Archive*, www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/.

³ *ibid*

⁴ *ibid*

runs through the whole history of civilisation to the present day."⁵ The clear characteristic being division of labor, it is tension and conflict of interests between the agricultural laborer and the craftsman which creates the antagonism between town and country. "It is the most crass expression of the subjection of the individual under the division of labour, under a definite activity forced upon him -- a subjection which makes one man into a restricted town-animal, the other into a restricted country-animal, and daily creates anew the conflict between their interests."⁶

Another unfortunate consequence of division of labor is alienation. "For Marx the process of alienation is expressed in work and in the division of labor. Work is for him the active relatedness of man to nature, the creation of a new world, including the creation of man himself. (Intellectual activity is of course, for Marx, always work, like manual or artistic activity.) But as private property and the division of labor develop, labor loses its character of being an expression of man's powers; labor and its products assume an existence separate from man, his will and his planning."⁷

Hitherto we have seen how the transition from "barbarism to civilization" emerged division of labor, and from division of labor emerged class. This evolution occurs concurrently with the evolution of private property.

The next major epoch of history occurred in the transformation of the relations of production, the "different forms of ownership"⁸, which Marx equates to the various stages of development in the division of labor, of which we have shown above

"The third form of ownership is feudal or estate property. If antiquity started out from the town and its little territory, the Middle Ages started out from the country. This different starting-point was determined by the sparseness of the population at that time, which was scattered over a large area and which received no large increase from the conquerors. In contrast to Greece and Rome, feudal development at the outset, therefore, extends over a much wider territory, prepared by the Roman conquests and the spread of agriculture at first associated with it."⁹

The material conditions for feudalism to emerge were set forth by the slave-owning society that preceded it. Much land had been deforested and claimed, reducing the availability of free, uncultivated land. This led to monopolization of land and production of landed private property. It also characterized the feudal development and genesis from the country rather than the town. The working-class of this period was defined as its relations to the means of production in that it owned its own capital: the land, the tools ("the chief form of property during the feudal epoch consisted on the one hand of

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Fromm, "Marx's Concept of Man," *Marxists Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/fromm/works/1961/man/index.htm>.

⁸ Marx, Karl, and Engels, Frederick, "The German Ideology," *Marxists Internet Archive*, www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/.

⁹ *ibid*

landed property with serf labour chained to it”¹⁰) but was bound to the land through the material conditions dominant and justified by the State through the law. “[T]he the State is the form in which the individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests.”¹¹ There was also a counterpart of the country in the town with trade guilds representing the division of labor.

Feudalism was the final form of ownership before modern capitalism. The transition from feudalism to capitalism marked the start of a new era. Its contradiction between the forces and relations of production caused bourgeois revolution to overtake the world and end the last economic epoch before the current.

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ ibid