Marxism-Leninism

Draft of the Basic Training
of the Communist Party

Communist Party

Basic Training
Marxism-Leninism

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In Praise of Learning

Learn the simplest things! For you
whose time has come
it is never too late!
Learn your ABC, it is not enough, but
learn it! Do not let it discourage you!
Begin! You must know everything!
You must take over the leadership.

Learn, man in the asylum!
Learn, man in prison!
Learn, wife in the kitchen!
Learn, man of sixty!
You must take over the leadership.
Seek out the school, you who are homeless!
Sharpen your wits, you who shiver!
Hungry man, reach for the book: It is a weapon.
You must take over the leadership.

Don't be afraid of asking, brother!
Don't be won over,
See for yourself!
What you don't know yourself.
You don't know.
Add up the reckoning.
Put your finger on each item
ask: how did it get here?
You must take over the leadership.

Bertolt Brecht

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Quotations have been translated from the German version used in the original text.

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1 Introduction

The world we live in is a capitalist world. Capitalism means that all economic activity, every area of social life, is geared towards maximizing profits for capital; it means that the means of production are in the hands of the few and are not used by society for society; it means that people's needs are not the goal and purpose of production, but regularly fall by the wayside; it means immeasurable wealth for the few and poverty, hardship and deprivation for the many. After all, capitalism also means that political power, despite all the talk of "democracy", ultimately lies in the hands of a small minority of capitalists, i.e. in the hands of the class that also owns capital . Under the compulsion to constantly fight to maintain and increase their profits, it is in the interests of the capitalists to drive down the living standards of the working masses and to cover the world with wars over resources, markets and investment opportunities.

The capitalist system tends to fall into ever more severe crises, which plunge masses of workers into misery, unmistakably proving time and again that in today's era of imperialism, capitalism is historically obsolete. Capitalism cannot be shaped in accordance with human needs; private ownership of the means of production grows in ever sharper contradiction to the social character of production. Socialism is the next form of society where the development of the productive forces is achieved through social planning. A better life is only possible in a different society.

Socialism is a society in which the economy serves the people by planning and implementing production according to the needs of all people. We are fighting for such a society. The goal of socialism is more relevant than ever, even if anti-communist propaganda would have us believe that the destruction and temporary defeat of socialism in the Soviet Union and the GDR in 1991 also meant the failure of the communist idea. But the flame of communism continues to

burn! No matter how hard our opponents tried, they could not extinguish this flame. The contradictions of capitalism continue to point to socialism as the next necessary and progressive social formation. Everywhere in the world where the exploited rise up against their exploiters, there is the possibility that the idea of a classless society will spread again. And even today, in many countries around the world, these struggles are still—or again—being waged under the red banner of communism.

However, "t*he role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory*" (Lenin: What is to Be Done?, Lenin Collected Works, Volume 5 (from here on: LCW 5), p.370). This quote comes from Lenin, one of the three fundamental "classics" and founders of our worldview, Marxism-Leninism. A movement that does not know its exact goal cannot develop in the right direction. If the movement follows false theories in which capitalism is justified or declared to be reformable, it cannot develop into a powerful force against the system. It will then repeatedly run after illusions, fail because of its false hopes and offer nothing but disappointment to its supporters. A working class that is guided by revolutionary theory, that understands what the causes of its situation are and how this situation can be changed, is an enormous power as soon as it organizes itself. To form the working class in Marxism-Leninism, the unification of the labor movement with the theory of scientific socialism is therefore the necessary condition for the overthrow of capitalism, for the socialist revolution. Marxism is not a "pure theory" that a few university professors can occupy themselves with, but which would otherwise have no meaning. It is a science that is geared towards the revolutionary transformation of society. Marx formulated: "*Philosophers have only* ***interpreted*** *the world differently ; what matters is to* ***change*** *it.*" (Marx: Theses on Feuerbach, Marx and Engels Complete Works, Volume 5 (from here on: MECW 5), p. 5).

To make this change possible, we need a **Communist Party**, which leads the struggle of the working class for its interests and represents it most consistently. For only a party of a new type can confront our class enemy, organized through the bourgeois state: a party with a collectively discussed and uniformly implemented programme, a scientifically derived strategy and tactics to lead the working class to smash the bourgeois state. In the Communist Party, the sections of the working class whose political consciousness is the most advanced organize themselves.

The communist movement in Germany is in a deep crisis. Our goal is a clarification process on the important questions of the workers' movement. Our aim is to gather the forces that are striving for this clarification on the basis of scientific socialism in order to form a strong and united Communist Party. The Communist Party was founded for this purpose.

The aim of this basic training course is to convey the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism in the most comprehensible language possible. It has been written

to introduce the broadest possible masses to scientific socialism and to educate generations of new communists who will tackle the great task of forming the Communist Party and a class-struggle workers' movement. Every day we are confronted with the most diverse opinions, arguments, questions and problems, to which we as communists must find answers in the interests of the working class. In the present situation, in which the world communist movement is in a deep crisis and has to come to terms with countless theoretical and practical errors, the task of communists is also to organize a scientific clarification process that can shed the necessary light on the darkness of theoretical and practical ambiguities. For all these tasks, the most comprehensive possible understanding of scientific socialism is the fundamental prerequisite.

The building of a communist party in Germany cannot be separated from the continuous study of scientific socialism, of our foundations. For this is the prerequisite for combating revisionism, the penetration of bourgeois ideology into our ranks and thus the disintegration of our movement. A collective understanding of the world, a common and unified basis is also necessary in order to achieve the discipline and clout of a party or the organizational structure of a party. Otherwise, we will educate each other into mindless obedience: communists who cannot lead the working class. The Basic Training tries to make a contribution to this and to deal with the questions that are relevant for this:

- How do we arrive at the correct insights into reality? What are the dangers involved and how can we combat them?
- What laws govern processes in our world? What laws govern the development of human history and how does this relate to the next step, socialism?
- Why can capitalism not be reformed, and what is the relationship between reform and revolution? Why is capitalism fundamentally crisis-ridden, and why is it therefore not enough to fight neoliberalism?
- Why do wars inevitably arise in the era of imperialism? Why can there be no peace in the capitalist system?
- How can we organize ourselves as communists to overthrow the bourgeois state in today's era? What alliances can we form and what are the pitfalls?
- How can the working class shape the path to a just, needs-oriented society after the revolution?

Marxism-Leninism, or scientific socialism, was founded by three great thinkers: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. We will take a brief look at these three people and their lives in Chapter 2 below. When we refer to these three as our "classics", do we mean that they were infallible and that their every word should be regarded as holy scripture? Of course not. They were no more infallible than other people and their teachings are not dogmas that cannot be questioned. On the contrary: this introduction should encourage everyone to form

their own opinion about the extent to which the theses of scientific socialism are convincing. However, as communists, we naturally also have an opinion on this. We believe that Marxism-Leninism rightly claims to be the scientific worldview of the working class and is indispensable both for understanding the world and for the practical struggle for a better world. And Marx, Engels and Lenin have made the decisive contributions to the development and advancement of this worldview, even if there have been countless other Marxists who have also enriched it.

On the one hand, scientific socialism claims to be a closed world view, but on the other hand it is also very open: It is closed in the sense that it is a coherent body of thought in which all parts fit together and complement each other. It is open in the sense that, as a theory, it can never be "finished" and can never be closed to new insights or the correction of misconceptions. Contrary to anti-communist propaganda, which often accuses Marxism-Leninism of being "dogmatic", i.e. doggedly adhering to long-outdated beliefs, in reality it is a living science that is not afraid to admit and correct its own mistakes and shortcomings. Lenin, who lived later than Marx and Engels, also developed Marxism considerably, which is why we speak of Marxism-Leninism today.

Marxism-Leninism consists of three core components, which in turn can be traced back to three main sources (see: Lenin: Three Sources and Three Components of Marxism, LCW 19).

Firstly, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels developed Dialectical and Historical Materialism, the philosophical basis of scientific socialism, i.e. its fundamental view of the world, discussed in Chapter 3. This was based on the insights of thousands of years of philosophical development, but above all on the German philosophy of the 18th and 19th centuries, such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach. Secondly, there is the critique of political economy, the study of the economic structure and functioning of capitalism. Here Marx and Engels, and after them Lenin, were able to draw on the results of the bourgeois economics of their time, above all the findings of English economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo on the labor theory of value. Thirdly, scientific socialism as a theory of class struggle and socialist revolution, also derived from the practical experiences of the Paris Commune and the class struggles of the English proletariat. Another basis was the criticism of the lack of scientific derivation and voluntarism of revolutionary ideas of utopian socialists such as Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Robert Owen or Wilhelm Weitling. Since Marxism, as already mentioned, is a coherent theory, it is not possible to separate these three components from one another. One cannot, for example, consider the theory of the laws of capitalism (critique of political economy) in isolation from dialectical and historical materialism, which was the basis for the understanding of laws with which Marx, Engels and Lenin analyzed capitalism in the first place. Accordingly, the next chapter of the Basic Training begins by explaining our tool, the methodology of scientific socialism. It is just as impossible to separate the scientific theory of

class struggle from the critique of political economy, which explains the role of classes in capitalism in the first place.

In the early 20th century, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin decisively developed scientific socialism further. He applied it to the analysis of capitalism at that time and defended dialectical materialism in the field of materialist epistemology. He systematically devoted himself to the questions of how the workers' struggle can be successfully waged with the aim of taking power, and how the revolutionary party of the working class must be organized in today's imperialist age.

In line with the historical and intellectual development of the critique of political economy, Chapter 4 moves from Marx's insights into the commodity and the laws of capitalism to Lenin's insights into the current epoch of capitalism, imperialism.

Building on this, the following Chapter 5 presents the bourgeois-capitalist state as a tool of capital to enforce its interests. Our revolutionary strategy for socialist revolution is derived in Chapter 6 from our knowledge of the laws of capitalism and imperialism.

From the conditions of imperialism on the one hand and the strategic goal of the present epoch of capitalism on the other, the necessary demands on the communist party are derived, which are presented in Chapter 7. In its own ranks and also in the working class, the task of the CP is to find the correct orientation and to combat revisionism—the lawful penetration of bourgeois ideas into our ideology, disguised as the further development of scientific socialism (Chapter 8).

All of this should eventually culminate in socialism, the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and ultimately the transition to communism—in doing so, Chapter 9 looks at our historical achievements of actually existing socialism, and what lessons we must learn from them for our present-day approach to socialism.

Discussion question:

- **Why is Marxism-Leninism a science? What are its essential components and how do they relate to each other?**

What is the best way to work with this introduction?

The text is basically suitable for reading chapter by chapter in a group, in a reading circle and discussing it together, as well as for self-study. However, there are of course many advantages to working through the content together with others, exchanging ideas and examining the individual arguments for their validity. Because everything that is written here can be discussed and examined, nothing should simply be "believed" because it is there. To help you engage with the text, most chapters are followed by working questions and discussion questions. Of course, these are only suggestions. However, the working questions can structure the reading and should ensure that you have understood the core statements of each chapter and can reproduce them in your own words. The discussion questions can stimulate discussion, but there are certainly often other questions that can be discussed controversially. It is also advisable to make your own notes while reading, to mark important passages in the text and to write down questions and points of criticism.

The individual sub-chapters can be read as learning units. However, it is in the nature of things that some of them vary greatly in length. It is therefore advisable to be flexible in your reading group.

And don't forget: none of this is dry textbook wisdom, but is intended to guide and strengthen us in our fight against capitalism and for a socialist society.

2 Marx, Engels and Lenin

Scientific socialism has been further developed and applied in practice by countless people. Only through the interaction and the unity of struggle, understanding, and application, can we implement revolutionary actions and advance the organization of the working class. However, as indicated in the last chapter, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known by his fighting name "Lenin", played a particularly prominent role in this. These three important leaders of the working class are not at the forefront of this Basic Training. The focus is on the scientific doctrine that they founded. Nevertheless, it is useful to begin by briefly examining their lives and the historical conditions associated with them, as this will enable us to better understand the development of their insights in the context of the history of the workers' movement.

2.1 Marx and Engels

Karl Marx was born in Trier in 1818 to a family of German Jews. He studied law in Bonn from 1835, then in Berlin from 1836. He dealt extensively with questions of philosophy and history and soon came under the influence of the recently deceased idealist philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (see chapter 3.1.2). At this time, Hegel's followers were divided into two camps: the Old Hegelians or Right Hegelians on the one hand, who believed that the Prussian monarchy was the pinnacle of human development towards progress. In sharp contrast to them were the Young Hegelians or Left Hegelians, who rejected the Prussian state of the time and denounced the poverty and oppression of capitalism at the time. Marx belonged to the Left Hegelian group. He completed his doctorate in philosophy in 1841 on the subject of the materialistic natural philosophy of the ancient Greek philosophers Democritus and Epicurus.

Marx began working as an editor for the liberal Rheinische Zeitung in 1842 and soon became its editor-in-chief. At the time, it represented a radical democratic political point of view, advocating a radical democratization of society, overcoming backward religious prejudices and discrimination and the remnants of medieval social structures. The newspaper was soon banned by the state censorship authority in Cologne. From 1843–44, Marx began to maintain close correspondence with Friedrich Engels.

Engels was the son of a wealthy textile industrialist. Despite this background, he understood the miserable working conditions of the working class and held similar, at that time still radical-democratic views to Karl Marx. Engels also dealt a lot with philosophical questions and belonged to the left-wing Hegelians. However, he increasingly turned to materialist philosophy (in Germany, especially Ludwig Feuerbach, but also the French materialists). Engels deepened his sympathy with the workers' movement in Germany and England, became familiar with the workers' class struggle and, under this influence, began to study capitalism and how it worked.

At this time, Germany did not yet exist as a nation state, but rather as a multitude of small state units that were still ruled by princes and kings. The workers' movement emerged in Germany at this time, while at the same time the bourgeoisie was still pursuing revolutionary goals and was largely fighting for the abolition of princely rule. Economically, the bourgeoisie relied on the newly emerging capitalist industry, trade and banking.

Marx wrote down the beginnings of his new theory, scientific socialism, for the first time in his "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844" (MECW 3). Shortly afterwards, he and Engels collaborated on their works "The Holy Family" (MECW 4) and "The German Ideology" (MECW 5), in which they opposed the ideas of the Young Hegelians of their time. Here they criticized the shortcomings of both the idealistic Hegelians and the materialism of the time.

The publication of the "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (MECW 6), still known today as the "Communist Manifesto", was politically decisive in 1848. Marx and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto on behalf of the League of Communists, the first revolutionary workers' organization of the time. This text sets out the principles of the Communists' political program and world view.

In 1848 and 1849, bourgeois revolutions broke out in many European countries, including Germany. The revolutionary movement was directed against the rule of the absolutist royal houses, which increasingly became a shackle for the developing capitalist mode of production. The movement was supported by the emerging bourgeoisie—although the bourgeois class was already living off the exploitation of the working class, it still had an interest in implementing certain progressive changes such as overcoming the fragmentation of the small states or introducing bourgeois laws that guaranteed legal certainty for capital investments. The bourgeois promises of equality, freedom, fraternity and the rule of the people accord-

ing to the needs of capital were thus demanded.

The working class already played a decisive role in these revolutionary uprisings, but development within the framework of the relations of production was not yet so advanced that it could have led the revolution politically. Marx and Engels supported the revolution, and Engels also took part directly in the revolutionary struggles.

After the defeat of the German revolution, Marx and Engels had to emigrate to England to escape political persecution in Germany and France. In the years that followed, Marx worked intensively on analyzing the class struggles in France. The resulting analyses ("The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850" (MECW 10) and "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" (MECW 11)) are still extremely instructive examples of how scientific socialism can be applied to analyze political developments and the processes underlying them.

Above all, however, Marx now devoted himself to the study of political economy. This was only logical, as one of the most important insights of their philosophical standpoint was that the development of every society is determined above all by its economic basis. Karl Marx's main work, "Capital" (MECW 35, 36 and 37), ultimately emerged from this study of economics. The first volume of this enormous work was published in 1867. Marx continued to work on the second and third volumes until his death, but did not manage to complete them. Engels, however, was able to edit them to such an extent that they were published in 1885 and 1894.

In the meantime, Engels focused more on dealing with fundamental philosophical questions. This resulted in some of the most important contributions to scientific socialism: the "Anti-Dühring" (MECW 25) as a pamphlet against Dühring's revisionism, which sought to introduce reactionary bourgeois elements such as racial theory into the workers' movement. „The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" (MECW 26), the „Dialectics of Nature" (MECW 25) and „Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy" (MECW 26) also played an important role.

The period in which Marx and Engels wrote their economic analyses was characterized by industrialization, which had already taken place at a rapid pace in England at the end of the 18th century and was now also gaining momentum in other countries. In the last third of the 19th century, i.e. during the lifetime of Marx and Engels, Germany and the USA became centers of the development of capitalist industry. Based on their experiences in Germany, but also in England and France, Marx and Engels developed their analysis of capitalist society, the class struggle between workers and capitalists and the misery in which the working class had to live.

Marx and Engels never confined themselves to the role of mere theorists during this period, but on the contrary also developed into leading figures in the emerging revolutionary workers' movement. In 1864, they participated in the founding

of the International Workingmen's Association, the first transnational alliance of the labor movement. They also played a leading role in the discussions about the direction of the workers' movement and advocated that the working class should set itself the goal of conquering state power.

The fragmentation into small states was overcome in Germany after the wars of unification in 1870/71. The German Reich was founded, not by a revolution of the progressive forces of the bourgeoisie, but by an alliance of the bourgeoisie with the old nobility and the conservative Prussian military.

France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War led to an aggravation of the situation of the French working class, on whose back the costs of the war were to be borne. When the working class destroyed the bourgeois state for the first time in Paris in 1871 and established its own power for a few weeks, the "Paris Commune", Marx and Engels greeted this first proletarian revolution with enthusiasm. The Commune of Paris, Marx and Engels wrote, was the first example of the dictatorship of the proletariat that they aspired to. After the Commune was crushed by French and German military forces and resulted in a terrible massacre of the revolutionary workers, Marx analyzed the causes of the painful defeat in his essay "The Civil War in France" (MECW 22). After Marx's death in 1883, Engels continued his work and, until his own death in 1895, continued to strive to build the international workers' movement on the programmatic basis of scientific socialism.

Discussion questions

- **How was Germany able to develop from "Kleinstaaterei" to the foundation of the German Empire? Briefly discuss the role of the bourgeoisie and the working class.**
- **Why was it possible for Marx and Engels to develop this theory? What were important historical, societal, social, etc. developments? What were the important historical, social, etc. developments?**

2.2 Lenin and the Bolsheviks

Lenin was born in 1870 in the Russian city of Simbirsk on the Volga (today named Ulyanovsk after Lenin) into a respected family. Despite his upper-class background, Lenin's brother Alexander was a member of a revolutionary, albeit non-Marxist, group that believed it could change the deeply unjust social conditions in Russia through terrorist attacks. After an assassination attempt on Tsar Alexander III, he was executed. This experience had a great impact on the young Lenin. He studied revolutionary Russian literature and when he began his studies

in Kazan, he took part in the political actions of the student movement. In the 1890s, he also began to study Marxism, partly through the writings of the Russian Marxist Georgi Plekhanov, but also by reading the works of Marx and Engels. In 1895, he took part in the founding of the "League of Struggle for the Liberation of the Working Class" in St. Petersburg, which united with other socialist groups to form the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) in 1898.

In 1903, at its Second Party Congress, the RSDLP split into the reformist Mensheviks and Bolsheviks (named after the Russian word for majority, because they were the majority at the split), who formally remained in the same organization but each developed their own policies. The Mensheviks (the minority faction) believed that Russia was too backward for a socialist revolution and therefore capitalism had to develop in Russia before socialism was possible. They therefore rejected revolutionary action for fear of frightening off the liberal bourgeoisie, which they saw as the main force behind the development of a bourgeois-capitalist society in Russia. The Bolsheviks under Lenin's leadership, on the other hand, propagated a bourgeois-democratic revolution under the leadership of the working class to overthrow tsarism as the first stage of their struggle and the proletarian revolution in Russia as the second stage. Lenin saw the Russian Tsarist Empire as the weakest link in the chain of imperialism—the country lagged behind the leading imperialist countries such as England, France or Germany, the industrial proletariat made up only a small part of the population, but their class consciousness and fighting spirit had already been developed and tested in several struggles against the state and capital, such as the mass strikes and the 1905 revolution. In Lenin's view, this was the link to be broken by the Russian working class in order to bring about revolutions in other countries and, with the help of these countries, it would be possible to build socialism in Russia too. Moreover, Lenin and the Bolsheviks believed that the party of the working class could not be a loose and noncommittal collection of more or less active supporters, as the Mensheviks believed, but could only succeed as a well-organized and disciplined organization of convinced Marxists—an organization of revolutionaries who had made the struggle for revolution their life's work.

As a result of this split, the Bolsheviks succeeded in building a strong and unified revolutionary party in the years that followed, even if there were still fierce disputes about the correct line to take. Lenin increasingly developed into the political and theoretical leader of the Bolshevik faction. Between 1905 and 1907, an attempt was made in Russia to launch a bourgeois revolution against the Tsar's autocracy. The RSDLP already played an important role in the cities. However, the revolution was bloodily suppressed. In the years that followed, the Bolsheviks had to build up their party under the difficult conditions of tsarist oppression. Lenin developed his theory of the revolutionary cadre party and the proletarian revolution during this period in various writings: "What is to be done?" (LCW 5), "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back" (LCW 7), "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky" (LCW 28) and finally, in the summer of 1917, "The State and Revolution" (LCW 25), in which he emphasized the Marxist conception

of the bourgeois state and used it to justify the necessity of the revolutionary destruction of this state, against the reformists. In 1908, he defended Marx's theory of knowledge in "Materialism and Empirio-criticism" (LCW 14). This was Lenin's reaction to idealistic, epistemologically hostile attacks on Marx's theory of knowledge by Austrian, German and Russian bourgeois authors, which intensified after the failed revolution of 1905.

Against the backdrop of the First World War, Lenin also wrote one of his central works, "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism" (LCW 23). In it, he recorded the development of capitalism into its imperialist epoch, the epoch of the emergence of monopolies and finance capital, and also criticized revisionist theories in this context, for example in assumptions about imperialism's capacity for peace or in reducing the essence of imperialism to its military level.

In practice, this revisionism, as well as the dispute over revolutionary strategy and the right form of organization, made itself painfully felt: in Germany in particular, the split between revolutionary communists and reformists came very late, so that in 1914 the leadership of German Social Democracy backed its "own" ruling class at the start of the First World War and was thus able to lead the workers to the slaughter of the war in their millions. The internationalist and revolutionary sections of the movement that had rejected the war had to reorganize themselves completely. The two fundamental questions, the questions of revolutionary strategy and the form of organization, are still the most central points of contention between revolutionary communists and reformists in the workers' movement. They are also central points of contention among communists. In the aftermath of the events surrounding the First World War, the workers' movement was in a deep crisis, but at the same time had demonstrated its power and revolutionary potential.

The failure of the November Revolution in Germany in 1918 revealed the bitter consequences of the delayed independent organization of the revolutionary communists in Germany. In Russia, by contrast, the centuries-old Romanov tsarist dynasty was overthrown in February 1917. Russia became a bourgeois-democratic republic. However, like the Tsar's regime, the new government was just as unable to satisfy the essential demands of the workers and peasants, who above all longed for an end to the murderous world war, a redistribution of the land and bread. Only the Bolsheviks were in a position to respond to these wishes of the masses. Lenin again played a key role here: when he returned from his exile in Switzerland in April 1917, he presented the political program to be pursued in the struggle for socialism in Russia in his "April Theses" (The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution, LCW 24). In it, he argued that only a seizure of power by the workers' and soldiers' councils (soviets), which had formed during the revolution, combined with the nationalization of industry and banks, the distribution of land to the peasants and an end to the war, could provide a solution. The organized resistance of the working class continued to grow over the course of the summer of 1917, until in October (November according to today's calendar)

1917 the workers of the large cities, supported by the masses of peasants in the countryside and under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, were able to take power.

This was the first time that a proletarian revolution had triumphed. Under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, the revolutionary workers, who had managed to win over the majority of the peasantry, now began to build a socialist society. The peasantry played a very important role in Russia because it represented the absolute majority of the population in a largely rural country.

But while the seizure of power in October had been relatively bloodless, all of Russia's backward-looking political forces, who wanted to turn back the clock and restore capitalism and the rule of the landowners, were now preparing to storm the new state power of the workers and peasants. The peasants played a complex role in this: as Lenin himself described, the struggle was initially directed against the feudalist structures during the bourgeois-democratic revolution in alliance with the entire peasantry, but with the fall of the tsar this turned into a struggle of the poor peasants with the working class against the new provisional bourgeois government, the capitalists and the large peasants, the kulaks (LCW 11). The counter-revolutionary forces of Russia, the supporters of the tsar, nobles, entrepreneurs and landowners, numerous old officers and functionaries of the old regime, clergymen and other opponents of the new order began to arm themselves and, with the active help of the capitalist countries, formed themselves into the "White Army". Together with foreign intervention troops from almost all major capitalist countries, the White Army began a bloody civil war that cost the lives of millions of people. However, with the support of the workers and the majority of the peasants and by building up a revolutionary Red Army, the revolutionary government was ultimately able to win the war and bring it to an end in 1921/22.

Even after the victorious revolution, Lenin continued to write important works on the theory of the proletarian revolution, such as "Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder" (LCW 31), in which he dealt with the pseudo-radical, but in reality unrealistic and sectarian positions of the communists in various countries. He also wrote the most important programmatic writings of the newly founded Communist International and was thus, like Marx and Engels, one of the most important organizers of the international union of the proletariat. Lenin died in January 1924.

His successor at the head of the Bolshevik Party was Iossif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, whose party name was Stalin. Under Stalin's leadership, agriculture in the new state—the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR or Soviet Union for short)—was consolidated into collective farms and modernized, industrialization was rapidly advanced and finally the invasion of the Soviet Union by fascist Germany was successfully repelled. The Soviet Union became the first socialist state and a world power, which for decades became the main adversary of the imperialist states, above all the USA.

Working question

- **What were the key issues of contention between Mensheviks & Bolsheviks? What consequences were drawn from them?**

Discussion question

- **Why was it possible for Lenin in particular to develop this theory? What were important historical, societal, social, etc. developments? What were the important historical, social, etc. developments?**

3 Dialectics and materialism

Why is it important for communists to engage with philosophical questions? After all, isn't philosophy often just a collection of abstract discussions with little connection to reality? And aren't communists already preoccupied with organizing the struggle against capitalism and mobilizing the masses? In this chapter, we will discover that seemingly distant and abstract questions—such as those about the origin of life, change and stasis in nature, matter and spirit, and the forces behind movement—carry immense political significance. This is because politics is not a separate, compartmentalized field, but one intertwined with many other issues. **To change the world, one must first understand it properly, and recognize the rules by which it functions.** This is why a successful political strategy requires a solid scientific foundation. However, the scientific theory of communists cannot be confined to society alone, because society is part of a larger whole. It is interconnected with the rest of the world, with humanity and with nature, all of which influence how society functions.

Philosophical views on these questions always have an impact on how society is understood and how one relates to prevailing social conditions. It is no accident that the dominant philosophy of our time, as taught at universities, usually serves to justify capitalism.

Philosophical views are no more neutral than political opinions, and there can be no compromise on philosophical matters: the goal is to uncover the true nature of reality. You cannot accept a false view out of politeness or for the sake of peace, as you might refrain from making a political remark in social settings to avoid sparking a heated argument.

The class struggle also extends into the realms of philosophy and science. Dialectical and historical materialism, the core worldview of Marxism, takes a political stance, as does every philosophical position: it is ultimately aimed at the

liberation of the working class and the masses from oppression, exploitation, and suffering. This perspective is not an excuse to manipulate scientific facts to fit one's own worldview, as bourgeois scientists often do; rather, it is a motivation to confront reality as plainly as possible. Unlike the defenders of class society, as communists, we have a vested interest in the truth. The deliberate falsification and distortion of facts runs counter to the essence of scientific socialism. Because, as always, if we want to change the world, we must first understand it—not as we wish it to be, but as it truly is.

Marx and Engels devoted considerable time to studying the history of philosophy and formulating their own answers to philosophical questions because they recognized that the correct strategy in the struggle against the ruling class must be derived scientifically. Lenin, too—though he is best known as a politician and revolutionary—engaged deeply with philosophy. Even as late as 1914, with the First World War underway and just three years before the triumph of the Great October Revolution, Lenin was still immersed in a detailed study of Hegel's philosophy.

Clearly, Marx, Engels, and Lenin regarded philosophical questions as politically significant, as otherwise they would hardly have spent their scarce time on them in the midst of the fiercest class struggles.

Postmodernism

The heterogeneous movement of postmodern philosophy, which emerged in the latter half of the 20th century, has had a problematic influence on contemporary humanities. Although the precise definition of its content is disputed even among postmodern philosophers, postmodern philosophy is generally characterized by the rejection of so-called grand narratives (e.g. "the history of all previous society is the history of class struggles") and the denial of the existence of an objective, coherent truth. Instead, it argues that truth is constructed depending on historical and social context. Accordingly, the Marxist-Leninist method of cognition—the assertion that one can identify regular patterns in reality—is criticized as impossible and too mechanical. However, this amounts to no more than an attack on the tools we need to develop a strategy for class struggle. The left movement today is largely dominated by postmodern identity politics, which emerged at the end of the last century explicitly in opposition to materialist, Marxist epistemology. The accurate recognition of individual and structural discrimination, such as racism or sexism, becomes disconnected from the examination of their function for the bourgeois state and the relations of domination. As a result, the system-supporting function of these mechanisms go

unrecognized, making it impossible to address the root causes of oppression. Instead of facing collective struggles, the working class is fragmented and divided, with the aim often being the "representation" of oppressed minorities in positions of power. This illustrates the deeply problematic influence of idealism—rather than seeking to understand objective laws and transform society based on this understanding, the focus shifts to altering one's own consciousness and that of society as a whole, leading to a superficial change that only addresses the ideal level.

An example of direct legitimization for bourgeois rule would be the reflections of the academically influential philosopher Axel Honneth, a successor of the Frankfurt School, as well as in the work of his student Rahel Jaeggi, who is prominent in academic circles. In works such as 'The Law of Freedom', Honneth ignores the bourgeois state as an instrument of domination by the ruling class, instead portraying it as a necessary framework in which a "moral" market society can unfold, provided that "economic actors" acknowledge themselves as members of "a cooperative community." Like many other philosophers, Honneth is in turn influenced by Jürgen Habermas, also a member of the Frankfurt School and one of the world's most widely read modern philosophers and social scientists. His influence is particularly dangerous because his theories—as is usual for revisionism—present themselves as a far-reaching critique of capitalism, but ultimately fixate on the issues of so-called unleashed capitalism and aggressive foreign policy. This approach reinforces the illusion that capitalism and imperialism can be reformed and constrained. According to Habermas' ideas, "democratic" decisions in a bourgeois state can be legitimate if a robust civil society is involved in them. In his theory of communicative action, discourse and communication take center stage, while the dynamics of domination, power relations, and the class struggle are relegated to the background.

3.1 What is materialism?

Throughout the history of philosophy, there have been numerous perspectives and disputes among them. However, these arguments have consistently revolved around one fundamental question: the relationship between matter and consciousness.

To approach this question, we must first clarify what we actually mean when we refer to matter.

3.1.1 What do we mean by 'matter'?

Physics has a very specific concept of matter. In the natural sciences, 'matter' generally refers to the building blocks from which bodies and substances are composed. Matter thus includes chemical substances, the atoms that form them, and the subatomic particles that make up atoms, and so on. Meanwhile, some parts of the real world, like light, are not considered matter. However, modern physics has shown that this view is too rigid—light, for instance, can behave both as a wave that carries energy and as a particle of matter, a phenomenon explored and confirmed through experiments on wave-particle duality.

The philosophical concept of matter is more comprehensive than the physical one. Lenin defined matter as an "objective reality existing independently of the human mind and reflected by it." (Lenin: Materialism and Empirio-criticism, LCW 14, p. 261; see box). In this sense, 20th-century physics has moved closer to this understanding. However, even things that physics does not address, such as the metabolism of animals and plants or human society and its processes, are still part of matter—part of the material reality of the world.

Matter itself can neither be created nor destroyed. Its forms can change, and they do so constantly: hydrogen and oxygen can combine to form water, and conversely, water can be separated back into the components hydrogen and oxygen. Energy can convert into mass (as explained by the theory of relativity) and vice versa. Similarly, one social formation can transform into another through revolution. Yet, no process in the world can alter the fact that matter exists, and its total quantity remains constant.

3.1.2 Materialism and idealism

So, which is the original, determining factor: matter or consciousness? There are two opposing, mutually exclusive perspectives on this.

According to **idealism**, the mind, or consciousness, is fundamental, while the material world is secondary. For idealism, consciousness is not a product of matter but exists independently of and outside the material world. There are many variations of this view, which we will come to shortly.

According to **materialism**, on the other hand, the material world is the basis from which consciousness emerges. Cognition, therefore, is a form of representation of matter within consciousness. However, matter exists independently of and outside of consciousness.

There are two main branches in idealism: objective and subjective idealism. Both share the belief that the ideal is fundamental. Objective idealism, however, understands the ideal as something that exists independently, outside the human mind. For example, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (c. 427–347 BC) argued that every real thing is based on an "idea," with the real thing being merely an incomplete expression of this idea. The individual fish, for instance, is only an expression of the objective "idea" of a fish, which exists outside the human mind. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), while not going as far, still believed that an external world exists outside of our consciousness and stimulates our ideas. In his view, however, there is a „thing in itself" behind these perceived phenomena that produces them, though we cannot grasp nor recognize it.

The German philosopher Hegel (1770–1831) believed in the existence of an objective spirit that develops from within itself. According to him, the development of nature and history is therefore only an expression of this spirit progressing in its own development. At the same time, however, Hegel presented the development of the spirit as a dialectical process driven by internal contradiction. This approach marked an important advancement in philosophical thought, which Marx and Engels later built upon in their own theories.

The other major branch of idealism is subjective idealism. Its proponents argue that consciousness creates the world, and that there is no world independent of an individual's consciousness—or at the very least, it is not knowable. An extreme representative of this position was George Berkeley (1685–1753), who fundamentally denied the existence of any world at all outside of human perception. In addition to the identity politics mentioned above, modern examples of subjective idealism can be found in the bourgeois concept of fascism and its causes. Fascism's terrorist form of rule is not viewed as a variant of bourgeois rule (see chapter 5); instead, both fascism and the aggressive foreign policy of contemporary imperialist states are attributed to misguided ideas and evil thoughts emerging in the distorted consciousness of individuals, which can spread among the (uneducated) masses. These explanations, of course, serve the interests of the ruling class, as they conceal the real instruments of power and, in doing so, hinder the struggle against them.

We can break down the fundamental philosophical question about the relationship between matter and consciousness into two parts. First, does matter give rise to consciousness, or is it the other way around? An idealist response to this would suggest, for instance, that the world's fate is governed by a divine being or that the world was created by a god.

The second question concerns cognition: Is our perception of the world truly the

perception of something that exists independently of and outside our consciousness? Or is our entire perception essentially a form of imagination, where the external world we believe we perceive either doesn't exist or is unknowable? An idealist theory of cognition would support the latter view.

3.1.3 The materialist view of the world

So, what is materialism? In fact, every person naturally holds a materialistic view of the world: we assume that the world we move through, perceive, and change through our actions truly exists. This is the first principle of the materialist worldview: an objective reality exists, and we can perceive it. We will explore materialist epistemology in more detail in Chapter 3.4.

However, materialist philosophy goes even further. It is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between thinking and being. According to materialism, thought, consciousness, and the mind did not originate outside the material world, but are products of its development. Humans and their consciousness are the result of both natural history and the history of society which they themselves shape. The laws governing the development of the material world also determine the emergence and functioning of consciousness. Consciousness is a function of the nervous system, which is itself material and operates according to the laws of nature. Consistent materialism holds that not only is consciousness produced by matter in nature, but society's development also produces and profoundly shapes human consciousness. We will explore this further in Chapter 3.5.

Materialism means viewing the world as it truly is—seeing the material facts in their actual, inherent context, rather than in a mystically constructed one, as religions do. As Lenin states:

"*The fundamental distinction between the materialist and the adherent of idealist philosophy consists in the fact that the materialist regards sensation, perception, idea, and the mind of man generally, as an image of objective reality. The world is the movement of this objective reality reflected by our consciousness. To the movement of ideas, perceptions, etc., there corresponds the movement of matter outside me. The concept matter expresses nothing more than the objective reality which is given us in sensation.*" (LCW 14, p. 267).

The fundamental discoveries of natural science, such as the indestructibility of matter (the law of conservation of energy) or the connection between consciousness and the body, were first put forward as theses by philosophers before natural scientists were able to prove them. These ideas often guided scientists in the right direction, indicating what they should investigate. Thus, the development of philosophy played a crucial role in advancing science, just as scientific progress has, in turn, influenced the evolution of philosophy.

3.1.4 The battle between materialism and idealism in history

The battle between idealism and materialism has taken many forms throughout the history of thought. This struggle can be traced back to antiquity, where it was fought among different groups within the ruling class of slave owners. The most exploited class—the slaves—were unable to develop their own systematic philosophy, or if they did, none has survived. The philosophical debate between idealists and materialists was closely intertwined with the political debate between the aristocracy (advocates of aristocratic rule) and democracy (supporters of rule by free male citizens).

The philosophy of the Middle Ages in Europe and the Arab world was largely influenced by Aristotle, as well as by the doctrines of Christianity and Islam. During this period, philosophy often served to justify and support religion and the class rule of feudalism. Nevertheless, there were also materialistic approaches to knowledge; notably, Islamic scholars in the region around Baghdad developed systematic methods of experimentation and observation, for instance in the field of astronomy.

With the emergence of capitalism and the rapid progress of the natural sciences, the medieval view of the world began to become increasingly untenable. Thinkers such as Galileo Galilei, Johannes Kepler, Copernicus, Leonardo da Vinci and others began to explain the world with greater reliance on scientific observation, generalizing and connecting their findings. The institutions of the church fought scientific progress fiercely because it challenged their power base. The Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) put forward the thesis that the earth was not the center of the universe and that the universe, i.e. the material world, was infinitely large. The church had him burned at the stake for these views.

The emergence of capitalism, advanced production methods, and the rise of the natural sciences encouraged an interest in the study of nature in the following centuries. People once again began to place more trust in reason, instead of trying to derive all knowledge from holy scriptures.

In Germany, on the other hand, most of the great thinkers of the 18th and 19th centuries held idealistic views. Representatives of "German Idealism" were above all Hegel, Kant and Fichte, some of whom have already been mentioned. Ludwig Feuerbach was the main defender of materialism in Germany during this period. Feuerbach was a representative of the progressive ideas of the Enlightenment, which were directed against feudalism and the authority of the church. Like the English and French materialists, he believed in an objective reality existing outside of consciousness, as well as in eternal and indestructible matter that develops according to its own natural laws. He viewed the spirit as a product of matter and rejected the notion that God created mankind; instead, he considered religion and belief in God to be human creations. Marx developed Feuerbach's ideas but

criticized them for merely describing society while neglecting the fact that social circumstances are changed by human actions—that is, there is a reciprocal tension between the individual and society.

This long history of philosophical dispute between materialist and idealist views provided the foundation upon which Marx and Engels were able to build. Engels observed that the ancient Greek philosophers had already posed the essential questions that would occupy thinkers in the millennia that followed. These centuries-long debates were crucial for the emergence of dialectical and historical materialism. As brilliant as Marx and Engels were, they did not create the new worldview of Marxism out of nothing.They were only able to become giants because they themselves stood on the shoulders of giants. In particular, they drew on the dialectical teachings of Hegel, which we will deal with briefly in chapter 3.3, and on the materialism of Feuerbach.

Working question

- **What are the fundamental views of idealism and materialism?**

Discussion question

- **Are idealistic views always unscientific? Are materialist views fundamentally scientific?**

3.2 What is dialectics?

Everything that exists does so within the conditions of time and is subject to the process of change. The philosophical concept of movement encompasses all the processes of change in the universe, from simple shifts in an object's position to changes in thought. Life itself is inseparable from change and movement: the circulation of fluids, the transformation of carbon compounds, the growth, formation, and death of cells—all are essential parts of life. Non-living matter is no different: all atoms, even those in the farthest reaches of the universe, contain a certain amount of energy, and are therefore always in motion. Even the light that allows us to see moves in the form of waves and simultaneously as a stream of particles. The universe itself is never static. Thus, everything that exists shares this common property: it moves and changes.

Ancient Greek philosophy was already concerned with movement and its origins. If we ask why things move, we encounter one of the most significant problems in philosophy. When we consider how movement arises, it initially seems that every movement is the result of another: like a billiard ball that only moves when pushed, or a tree that does not fall by itself, but because it is felled or cannot withstand a storm. According to this idea, movement is always the consequence of another movement, which in turn results from yet another, and so on. This chain

can be traced back infinitely. The origin, or explanation of movement, cannot be discovered in this way. This difficulty led some philosophers to propose the idea of a „first mover," something that initiates movement without itself being moved by anything else.

Aristotle also assumed the existence of such a "first mover": a thing that can create movement from within itself. All creation stories in various religions are based on the idea that a pre-existing being—God—created the world and thus triggered its movement. But does this solve the problem? No, it does not. Because there is no scientific reason to assume the existence of a god. In fact, this idea contradicts the findings of science. We now know, through science, that consciousness is the product of specially organized matter (see chapter 3.3) and not the reverse. Additionally, science shows us that we don't need the concept of God to explain development and movement. The belief that things can only move when acted upon from outside is incorrect. Movement also exists as **self-movement**, meaning that an object can begin to change or move due to its inherent properties, rather than external forces.

3.2.1 Dialectics: a theory of movement and development

Dialectics, then, is a theory that examines movement in all its forms and seeks to understand its causes. These causes are not limited to immediate triggers—like a strong gust of wind causing a tree to fall—but aim to explain the laws of motion in a broader sense. For instance, a healthy tree wouldn't typically fall from a gust of wind. But if we explore the situation more deeply, we might find that the tree was rotten and thus unable to withstand the wind. The tree's decay is due to the fact that, like all living things, it has a limited lifespan. When it dies, its structure begins to deteriorate, a process that can be further explained by biochemistry. So, dialectical thinking would not only consider the wind's impact on the tree but also analyze both the tree and the wind in light of the natural laws governing them.

A fundamental principle of dialectics is that the movement of things follows certain laws. These laws arise from the universal interconnection of all things—meaning that everything in this world is, directly or indirectly, connected to everything else. There is nothing that exists in complete isolation or beyond the influence of other things. The world and matter, as a whole, must be understood as a unified system, a unity. To grasp why something changes, we cannot examine it in isolation but must consider it within its broader context. For instance, if we try to explain the movement of the moon by only focusing on the moon itself, we will fail. Why does the moon continually move in a circular orbit? The answer lies in its connection to the earth—the earth's gravitational pull causes the moon to orbit around it. The earth, in turn, revolves in an orbit around the sun, and life on earth can only be understood if we include the sun's thermal radiation. This in

turn is the result of a complicated physical process that takes place inside the sun, nuclear fusion. And so on. This chain of connections shows that things can only be truly understood when viewed within their larger context.

Earlier conceptions of movement could only conceive of a certain form of movement, such as shifts in position, or growth and shrinkage. However, we now understand that these are not the only forms in which change occurs. There is also the kind of change in which one thing transforms into something entirely different. There are countless examples of this. For instance, when the male sperm fertilizes the female egg, a new living being is created. In the 17th and 18th centuries, it was believed that a fully-formed, miniature human was already present in the sperm and would merely grow larger in the womb. Today, we know that this isn't the case. Sperm contains only part of the genetic material that will form a human being. Moreover, the process is far from complete at fertilization—initially, there is only a single cell from which the entire organism must develop. Change can therefore produce something qualitatively new. The laws according to which this happens can be scientifically investigated and recognized.

3.2.2 Unity and struggle of opposites

In our world, there exists an immense variety of laws, all interrelated and dependent on one another. According to the dialectical view, three general and fundamental laws of motion underpin the numerous specific laws (for instance in the natural sciences, the laws of gravitation, the laws of Newtonian mechanics, the laws of chemical reactions, etc.). However, these three basic laws are supplemented by a number of other dialectical laws.

The first of these fundamental laws is the **law of the unity and struggle of opposites**.

As already mentioned, a scientific theory of development must primarily uncover the source of the self-movement of things. According to materialist dialectics, this driving force lies in the contradictions inherent in all things. But what is meant by contradictions here? Most people may think of a contradiction as a statement and a counter-statement. For example, I might claim that the train will be 15 minutes late, while someone else asserts that it will arrive on time. In this case, there is a clear contradiction between our two statements. However it is a logical contradiction because, logically, the train cannot simultaneously be on time and 15 minutes late.

However, this type of contradiction is not what dialectics refers to. When we speak of dialectical contradictions, we do not mean logical contradictions that exist solely in thought, between different statements. Instead, we refer to contradictions that are part of reality—contradictions that actually occur in the material world. A dialectical contradiction arises when things, phenomena, or processes oppose each other while simultaneously forming a unity, with an interaction be-

tween them that eventually leads to a change in their relationship. It is not about conflicting statements but rather opposing forces or tendencies. On the one hand, the unity and struggle of opposites means that these forces have an opposing character, that they diverge of their own accord. On the other hand, however, they also form a unity, being interdependent and part of the same system.

To understand this, we should once again use an example, this time from social science. We will explore the economic basis of classes in capitalism later; for now, it suffices to note that there are two fundamental classes in capitalism whose interests fundamentally oppose each other. These two classes are the working class and the bourgeoisie (the capitalists). In a sense, the working class stands in direct opposition to the bourgeoisie: the working class must labor, while the bourgeoisie does not; the bourgeoisie owns the means of production, whereas the working class is characterized precisely by its lack of ownership of these means. Moreover, their class interests are at odds: the working class seeks better working conditions, higher wages, and ultimately the abolition of capitalism. Conversely, the bourgeoisie aims to keep labor as inexpensive as possible in order to maximize profits—and it has a vested interest in preserving the entire system that enables its wealth.

Although the bourgeoisie and the working class are mutually exclusive, they are both necessary components of a system within which only they can exist: capitalism. The bourgeoisie and the working class are inseparably linked, yet they remain distanced by their living conditions, worldviews, and objective interests. Thus, while they form a unity on one hand, the ongoing struggle between these two classes is unavoidable. If the working class prevails in this struggle, something entirely new emerges from this opposition: a society free from exploitation under the rule of the working class. This outcome also resolves the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the working class, as the bourgeoisie is expropriated and ultimately abolished. The working class will continue to exist, but no longer as an exploited, wage-dependent class.

The example thus illustrates that opposing tendencies or forces create a tense relationship that ultimately leads to the resolution of the tension or contradiction. It also demonstrates that together they can give rise to a new, more developed state. Consequently, the world can change on its own, through the interaction of its individual elements, without the necessity of divine intervention or anything of the sort.

Contradictions, in this comprehensive dialectical sense—as opposing effects that remain part of the same whole and lead to change—can be observed in all areas of reality: positive and negative electrical charges, action and reaction in mechanics, the creation and death of cells, military conflicts between states, and, of course, the class struggle are just a few examples.

Dialectics views development as an ascent from a lower to a higher level, including qualitative leaps from one level to the next. However, these leaps do not occur

across absolute boundaries where one thing suddenly transforms into another. In reality, such leaps always "announce" themselves in advance, meaning that they are prepared by longer-term developments. Moreover, they never completely eliminate the old; instead, alongside the change, there is always a remnant of the previous state that persists in the new state. Thus, even before humans, there were intelligent beings in the animal kingdom that used tools and were aware of their own existence to a limited extent—something that would be unthinkable for the vast majority of all animal species. We also observe the beginnings of such consciousness in today's great apes. Nonetheless, humans clearly possess unique abilities and characteristics that set them apart from all other animals; this will be explored later. The development of the brain and its capacity to generate consciousness was therefore a protracted process in which perception and mental processing grew increasingly complex until they yielded qualitatively new outcomes. At a certain point in their development, early humans became capable of communicating through language, developing an awareness of their own existence, and altering and shaping their environment according to their own goals and purposes, such as through the use of fire or the manufacture of weapons and tools.

3.2.3 The transition from quantitative to qualitative changes

Throughout history, social revolutions have always been prepared by slow quantitative processes, such as the growth of the socialist labor movement. Engels calls the fact that **quantitative changes turn into qualitative changes** the second of the basic laws of dialectics. All things have quantitative and qualitative characteristics. Quantity and quality are themselves in a moving relationship to each other: changes in proportions may initially have no effect on the properties of a thing. At a certain point, however, they do. If I heat a pot of water, for example, the temperature of the water increases slowly at first. When the temperature reaches 100°C, however, the water begins to boil and evaporate. Unlike quantitative changes, which occur gradually, such as the mere increase in temperature of liquid water, the transition to a new quality is always a leap. In the case of water, the transition to the new quality, the gaseous phase, is also sudden and discontinuous. For example, the density does not decrease steadily during this transition until the water has become a gas, but instead it decreases abruptly at the boiling point by a factor of around 1000. The old quality is destroyed by the leap, the revolutionary change, and replaced by something new that is essentially different from the old quality. With the quantitative change, a new dialectical unity is created within which future development takes place. For example, socialism is not simply an "enlargement" of capitalism, brought about by encouraging the growth of production. It is a fundamentally different way of producing and living than capitalism, even though it emerges from capitalism.

This law is so fundamental because qualitative leaps can be explained by the de-

velopment of the thing itself (such as nature or society) and no longer only by an external force, such as a god. A thing can therefore evolve into another due to laws of development that are inherent to it. In reality, of course, the influence of external factors always plays a role, as nothing exists in isolation from the rest of the world and the world as a whole constitutes a unity. However, this external influence is often not the decisive factor in the change, but only the trigger of a change that is inherent in the thing itself. For example: a seed will naturally only become a plant if it gets water, if there is enough sunlight, etc. But the fact that the seed can become a plant is not only due to sunlight and water, but also to the fact that this possibility of development is already inherent in the seed. If instead of a seed, you press a stone into the ground and water it, you will have to wait a long time for it to become a plant.

Revolutions therefore do not happen by chance at some point in history, but only when a society has become "overripe", when its internal contradictions get out of hand and it pushes of its own accord to be overcome. Marx comments: "*If we did not find latent in society as it is, the material conditions of production and the corresponding relationships of exchange for a classless society, all attempts to explode it would be quixotic [i.e. they would be in vain]*" (Marx: Grundrisse, MECW 28, p. 97).

3.2.4 Negation of the negation

When one qualitative level is supplanted by another, this has been referred to as negation or abolition since Hegel. Negation must always be understood in a threefold sense, reflecting the multiple meanings of the word in German. In this context, negation can signify preservation and erasure, as well as elevation to a higher level. In dialectics, a process of negation encompasses all three meanings: it retains elements of the abolished state, it eradicates and replaces other elements, and it elevates the entire system to a higher, more complex level.

For example, when feudalism collapsed and paved the way for capitalism in history, capitalism absorbed significant achievements from the development of feudalism: the rise of cities, the establishment of commercial and credit capital, and advancements in agricultural productivity, along with the most advanced weapon technology of that era. At the same time, fundamental aspects of feudalism were abolished: the privileges of the estates, the guilds, serfdom, various legal inequalities, and, in many countries, the monarchy itself. By merging a relatively advanced economy with bourgeois freedom of movement, equality before the law, and other factors, capitalism emerged as a completely new system. However, this negation is not definitive. Capitalism inherently carries a tendency toward its own destruction; eventually, it will come to an end. The demise of capitalism represents a new negation—a negation of a negation—leading to a new stage that will encompass elements of capitalism (and thus also of the preceding social orders) alongside new elements.

The law of the **negation of the negation**, which describes the movement of things in cycles, constitutes the third law of dialectics. However, cycles here do not imply that movement merely returns to the initial state, creating an eternally identical circle in which everything repeats itself. On the contrary, this refers to cyclical development, indicating that the entire system evolves through this circular movement, akin to a spiral. For instance, the metabolism of an animal involves certain recurring processes; yet the animal does not remain the same. It grows through its metabolism, ages, and eventually dies. When the cycle comes to a halt, it merges into a larger cycle of nature—the body decomposes, its elements are absorbed by other living beings, and so forth. The death of the animal thus gives rise to new life. Although the initial state (the birth of the animal) seems restored, it is only an illusion because it is not the same animal. The development of various animals and plants is not an eternal recurrence, as we know; rather, this cycle transforms over extensive periods of time. Over hundreds of millions of years, simple single-celled organisms have evolved into more complex animals, ultimately giving rise to mammals and birds, some of which have developed sophisticated brain functions, culminating in the emergence of humans. Countless biological species have vanished in this lawful process, while new ones have consistently arisen through natural selection. Thus, cycle and change are not mutually exclusive; they exist in the form of spiral developments. Later, we will examine how production in capitalism does not progress in a straight line—as a constant increase—but also manifests in cyclical patterns.

This process of negation is constantly at work in the development of the world. To a certain extent, negation always entails destruction, as something old is „negated“ or eliminated. At the same time, however, it also signifies the creation of something new. Without negations, the transition from something lower to something higher would be impossible. Of course, it is crucial to consider the nature of the negation: a seed can be “negated” by crushing it, which prevents any new plant from emerging and halts its development. However, when I plant the seed and allow it to germinate, it undergoes a different kind of negation. In this case, the seed negates itself through its inherent contradiction, transforming into a new, higher form: the plant.

3.2.5 Dialectics as the science of the overall context

Therefore, as a scientific method, dialectics does not consider perceptible things individually in their isolated existence; rather, it examines them in their relationships to one another and to the whole. In contrast, the predominant method of positivism in bourgeois science focuses on isolating each object and recording its properties without regard to context. Dialectics, on the other hand, always analyzes reality as an organic whole, where the parts are interrelated, rather than viewing it as a random collection of objects and facts or merely a sum of parts.

Dialectics, which Marxism-Leninism inherited from Hegel and other philoso-

phers, is not simply a scientific method of cognition, i.e. something that should be taken into account in scientific analysis. It is simultaneously the form of movement of all that exists and the method of thought with which we can understand this movement. Precisely because reality itself moves dialectically, it can also only be correctly recognized through the dialectical method. In Marxism-Leninism, unlike with some earlier thinkers, dialectics is of direct practical significance. Marxism-Leninism does not analyze the world out of mere curiosity; rather, it seeks to change reality, guided by scientific knowledge. The use of dialectics as a method for analyzing and transforming the material world according to its dialectical laws of development distinguishes scientific socialism from all other worldviews. This is one of the key elements through which Marx, Engels, and Lenin elevated socialism to the status of a science.

Marxism-Leninism describes the non-dialectical approach to reality, according to which "*things are understood as immovable and unchangeable in themselves, as given once and for all without inner contradictions*" (Introduction to Historical and Dialectical Materialism, p. 35), as metaphysics. "*To the metaphysician, things and their mental reflexes, ideas, are isolated, are to be considered one after the other and apart from each other, are objects of investigation fixed, rigid, given once for all. He thinks in absolutely irreconcilable antitheses*", writes Engels (Engels: Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, MECW 24, 299–300). Historically, however, the metaphysical approach to nature was justified and unavoidable, making a significant contribution to scientific knowledge. Many areas of natural science first required the dissection of nature into its individual parts and the collection of facts, which were inevitably perceived as eternal and unchangeable, as the laws governing nature's development had yet to be discovered. Compared to the methods employed by many medieval scholars, who rejected scientific inquiry and derived their statements about nature solely from theological beliefs, this represented a major advancement. Only when the sciences acquired sufficient knowledge about natural processes and their laws could a comprehensive understanding of nature and its constant change emerge. While metaphysical thinking in eternal, unchanging, and isolated terms was historically justified, it has become hopelessly outdated and now serves as an obstacle to scientific progress.

Such thinking permeates all social sciences, where the „market economy," i.e. capitalism, is presumed to be the „natural" and optimal order of things, thus making a claim to eternity. The brutal consequences of capitalism—such as hunger, unemployment, wars, racism, and the oppression of women—are not examined in terms of their real causes. Instead, they are obscured by being viewed in isolation, ignoring their relationship to the capitalist mode of production. This perspective is not scientifically tenable. The persistence of these beliefs among the ideologues of bourgeois society can be largely attributed to their class interests; whether consciously or unconsciously, they serve a class whose rule is historically outdated and inhibits both scientific and social progress. The workers' movement and its worldview, Marxism-Leninism, must also wage a philosophical battle against capitalism.

This example illustrates that dialectical thinking itself emerged in accordance with the laws of dialectics, representing the abolition of earlier forms of scientific thought and the transformation of an increasing body of scientific knowledge into a qualitatively new method of thinking.

In summary, dialectics is the doctrine of the laws of movement and development. As we shall see, it applies not only to the laws of nature but also to the laws of social development and the laws of thought.

Working questions:

- **How does dialectics explain movement?**
- **What is the content of the three fundamental laws of dialectics?**

Discussion question:

- **Does the change from quantity to quality always take place as a noticeable leap, as in the example of water? How is the relationship between steady and erratic development in the transition from different social formations to be understood?**

3.3 Dialectical materialism

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, of whom only a few fragments of text have survived, already articulated the essence of dialectical thinking, particularly the idea of movement in connection with the unity of opposites. Some 2300 years later, Hegel explained historical development as an ever-ascending progression of the spirit from lower to higher forms. Throughout this developmental process, the spirit inherits the legacy of the past, continually revising it in part, and thus ascends from one level to the next over time. For Hegel, the principles applicable to the spirit on the individual level also extend to the world spirit, which can be understood as a collective stage of development in the cognitive process of a given epoch. In Hegel's view, the level of development of the spirit at any given moment influences the advancement of other spheres of society (economy, law, politics, art, etc.), ensuring that they, too, continue to evolve toward higher forms.

Although Hegel does not deny the objective existence of matter, his dialectic is fundamentally idealistic because he views the development of spirit as the determining factor, relegating the role of matter to secondary importance. In contrast, Marx and Engels regard matter as the foundational element, considering human consciousness to be merely its consequence. They did not „invent" materialism; rather, they emerged as its most consistent advocates.

In the epilogue to the second edition of the first volume of "Capital", Marx explicitly distances himself from Hegel's dialectical method:

„*My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i. e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of „the Idea", he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of „the Idea". With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.*" (Marx: Capital, Volume I, MECW 35, p. 19)

For Marx, therefore, humanity is not only material itself, but also firmly connected to its material environment, from which it cannot separate itself. Consciousness is not merely a product of matter (the nervous system), but the contents of consciousness—the ideas and conceptions—are also an expression of the material world.

Unlike the idealist forms of dialectical thinking, materialist dialectics is a science grounded in the actual movement of things themselves. Materialist dialectics does not first invent dialectical laws of motion in the mind and then search for them in reality. Instead, it examines material reality as closely as possible to uncover the laws governing its movement. While these laws may later be theoretically formulated in people's minds, the theories are ultimately a reflection of the actual movement. This approach has important implications for scientific inquiry: if we discover that our ideas about reality do not align with reality itself, we must simply adjust our ideas accordingly. This is how scientific progress typically occurs.

We have now explored both materialism and dialectics. Materialist dialectics, or dialectical materialism, represents the union of the two. It is a dialectic that articulates the fundamental laws of development within the realm of matter, rather than solely in the sphere of the spirit. Furthermore, it is a materialism that does not perceive matter as dead and rigid, but as a dynamic entity characterized by constant movement, change, and contradiction.

For the ancient Greek philosophers, the term dialectic originally referred to the process through which dialogues between opposing positions could resolve contradictions and yield new insights. This approach was exemplified by the philosopher Plato, who consistently framed his theories as conversations among individuals with differing opinions, allowing them to exchange arguments and ultimately arrive at a common understanding. Over time, however, it became evident that it is not only thought that develops through contradictions, but reality as a whole. Thus, dialectics is not merely the science of the development of thought; it also encompasses the development of objective, material reality. The latter—the dialectical development of matter—is the fundamental aspect, while the development of thought serves as an expression of this material development. We will explore this concept in greater detail in chapter 3.5. Engels summarized dialectics as the "*nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought.*" (Engels: Anti-Dühring, MECW 25, p. 131).

3.3.1 Movement as a property of matter

According to dialectical materialism, matter possesses certain fundamental properties. The first of these is that matter is in a constant state of movement and change. This can manifest as a simple change of location, such as a train in motion, which is the focus of classical mechanics. However, as previously noted, there are other forms of movement that affect all existing things in the world. For instance, if the train is taken out of service and placed on a siding, it may seem as though it is no longer moving, as it is no longer traveling from station to station. Nevertheless, wind and weather will gradually alter it over time. It will rust, the paint will peel, and after a few years, without regular maintenance it will become unusable. This is because the materials it comprises continue to be in motion: the atoms and molecules in its metal are perpetually active. They undergo chemical reactions that inevitably result in changes to the material, even if these processes occur too slowly or on a scale too small to be observed with the naked eye. Thus, there is nothing that is entirely static. While an object may temporarily appear to be at rest—like our train—this rest is never absolute, as a complete absence of movement is impossible. What we perceive as rest is merely a temporary equilibrium, which will eventually be disrupted. What is truly constant is not rest, but movement.

To understand all this, we do not require a "divine" force that exists outside our world. The material processes themselves are the driving force behind all change. Self-motion represents the eternal mode of existence of matter and is the sole form in which matter exists. The discovery of self-motion, as revealed through the development of dialectics as the science of movement, was a decisive scientific achievement that emerged from the theoretical generalization of findings in the natural sciences. This breakthrough allowed for a comprehension of the movement of all things without having to resort to a god.

3.3.2 The coherence of the material world

The second central characteristic of matter is its unity. As mentioned earlier, according to the dialectical view, the world forms a unity: nothing exists in complete isolation. But what is the basis of this unity? Earlier dialectical thinkers assumed, for example, that there was a "primordial substance" from which everything was made, or that the unity, i.e. the comprehensive, interconnectedness of all things, stemmed from the fact that God had created the whole world as a unity and was omnipresent in it. These philosophical views are known as idealistic monism (from the ancient Greek "mónos," meaning 'only').

However, science has never been able to discover either a primordial substance or a God. In fact, the unity of the world exists through the material connection of things—in the fact that everything that exists interacts with each other, which in turn follows certain laws. This philosophical principle of material unity, which is also the basis of dialectical materialism, is therefore called materialistic monism.

Both idealistic and materialistic monism stand in contrast to the philosophical doctrine of dualism, which assumes two independent and equal substances, such as a separate body and mind. Dualism is unable to explain how these two substances interact with each other and usually requires religion and a god to solve this problem.

The unity of the world is not something that natural science was able to discover one day through an experiment or a specific observation. Rather, it is the result of a theoretical generalization of countless individual findings. Even spatially separated objects in nature interact with each other, e.g. by attracting each other, by acting through radiation (light, radioactivity, etc.), perhaps by displacing air molecules, and so on. It is the same in the area of society: important social events, such as economic upturns or crises, wars or revolutions, can happen in a distant place, but they still affect us. They also have an impact on the development of the economy, the class struggle and politics in general. As we will see later, capitalism has made relations between all parts of the world much closer than ever before. The unity of the world is thus making itself felt to a historically unprecedented extent.

Dialectical materialism does not stop at simply establishing the general interrelation of things. It also examines the exact nature of the respective connections, i.e. it is a science of the general connections and interrelationships that occur in reality, such as causality, the relationship between the general and the particular, the laws of nature and social laws. Contexts are not to be understood as a mere composition of separate parts, as in metaphysical thinking, just as Lego bricks are put together. The individual parts are not arbitrarily interchangeable, but are determined by their role, their function as part of the whole. The blossom of a flower, for example, is not to be considered on its own, but exists as part of the whole plant. It fulfills a function for the plant that is related to its reproduction and is dependent on the plant for its existence. The latter aspect can be seen from the fact that a flower in a vase withers more quickly because it then lacks important nutrients that can only be supplied by the rest of the plant's body. According to dialectical materialism, the whole is therefore never simply the sum of the parts, but the whole permeates its individual parts, it determines the connection between them and the laws according to which they change, develop and decay.

This also applies to the relationship between matter and consciousness. Consciousness cannot be separated from matter. There is no free-floating spirit that is not bound to a body. Dialectical materialism therefore contradicts the views of the various religions, which assume that the soul can exist outside the body before or after death. It also contradicts, for example, the view of the French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650), who believed that the world consisted of two independent substances, namely the "thinking substance" (i.e. the mind) and the "extended substance" (matter). In contrast to these ideas, however, the view of dialectical materialism is in line with the findings of science, e.g. on the nervous system, the origin of consciousness, etc.

3.3.3 Laws and causality

Thirdly, this uniform material world functions according to certain laws. This statement seems relatively banal at first. If there were no laws, there would be absolute chaos in the world. There would also be no solid bodies because they are only held together by the forces acting in the atoms and the bonds between the molecules. And of course there would be no humans. But as banal as this statement sounds, for many people it is by no means self-evident. Many bourgeois ideologues argue that nature may obey certain laws, but that another area of the material world, namely society and its historical development, has no such laws. We will deal with this view in chapter 3.5 on historical materialism. Suffice it to say at this point that there is nothing at all to support this assumption that a certain area of reality could be exempt from the lawful development to which the world as a whole is subject.

Regularities are based on the principle of causality. Causality means that certain causes lead to certain effects or consequences under certain conditions. Causal relationships exist in objective reality and there can be no effect without a cause. When I turn on the tap, the movement of my hand is the cause of the water pipe being opened and the water flowing out. However, the cause-effect relationship can also be more complex. For example, there are necessary and sufficient conditions for certain events. In our example, it is a necessary condition that I turn on the tap with my hand, but possibly not a sufficient condition—it could be, for example, that the water is turned off down in the cellar and therefore no water comes out of the tap anyway. In this case, the sufficient condition would only be fulfilled when I have also turned on the water in the cellar and the pipe is under pressure. But now we've only looked at one isolated event. In reality, of course, nothing happens in isolation from the rest of the world, but each process is a small part of the overall process. What is the cause of one thing can be the consequence of another and vice versa. In our example, the running water was the result of turning on the tap. However, it also becomes the cause of other events, e.g. the water meter shows increased consumption and the water bill rises. This in turn means that I have less money in my account after paying the bill. And so on.

If we know the laws of certain processes, we can predict these processes. We then know why a certain event happens this way and not otherwise. In this case, we speak of necessity. A necessary connection is one that can only be one way and not another. Coincidence, on the other hand, is something that could also be different. According to dialectical materialism, both necessary and accidental relationships exist objectively. Necessity is an inner lawful connection between different processes. Accidental are the external conditions in which the necessary is realized. Naturally, an accidental connection also has causes, and does not simply arise out of nothing.

However, it cannot simply be derived from the fundamental laws in exactly the same way. We will see, for example, that capitalism always necessarily leads to

economic crises. It cannot do otherwise. But exactly how these crises take place also depends on many coincidences (see box on the connection between coincidence and necessity).

The regularity of a process also means that, if the right conditions are in place, it is guaranteed to occur again and again, at any time and in any place. Science is based on this, but so is our everyday life. When a building is constructed, the architect assumes that the laws of statics, which we know from past observations, will also apply to the future. Recognizing the laws of nature has been humanity's task since it first began to think systematically. Dialectical materialism summarizes the findings of this process and brings them into a unified context.

Let us therefore note that dialectical materialism understands a law to be a necessary, general, essential connection between things and processes that can be repeated if the corresponding conditions are present.

Coincidence and necessity

Engels dealt extensively with the relationship between contingency and necessity.

He distances himself from two views:

On the one hand, the view that understands chance and necessity as absolute opposites and accordingly only allows what can be traced back to general laws to be considered necessary and everything that we do not yet understand to be accidental. Engels criticizes the fact that science thus cancels itself out, as it would have to investigate precisely that which we do not yet understand because the laws have not yet been recognized. On the other hand, he also rejects the strictly deterministic view, which denies randomness altogether by considering every detail of the universe, no matter how small, to be predetermined from the beginning of time. Engels, on the other hand, refers to Hegel, who rejected a strict separation between chance and necessity, but emphasized the close connection between the two (Engels: Dialectics of Nature, MECW 25, pp. 492–521). Elsewhere Engels writes: "But chance is only one pole of an interrelation, the other pole of which is called necessity. In nature, where chance, too, seems to reign, we have long since demonstrated in each particular field the inherent necessity and regularity that asserts itself in this chance." (Engels: The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, MECW 26, p. 273)

3.3.4 The contradictory nature of the material world

Fourthly, matter is contradictory in itself. We have already discussed this aspect in the previous chapter. Everything that exists contains opposing forces. At a certain point, the struggle between these opposites leads to everything that exists ceasing to exist. Only matter itself is eternal and indestructible, as well as certain fundamental laws according to which it moves. However, the forms of matter and its movement are constantly changing.

3.3.5 Forms of motion of matter

We can distinguish between three basic forms of movement of matter, which at the same time represent different stages of development of matter. The first form of motion is inorganic motion. This includes all movement of dead objects in nature, i.e. everything that is studied by physics, chemistry, astronomy, etc. The second form of movement, which has developed from the first, is life, i.e. the creation, life process and death of organisms. This is studied by biology and related branches of science (e.g. medicine). The third and highest form of movement, which in turn could only arise on the basis of life, is human society in its development. The social sciences (history, economics, etc.) are responsible for this.

Why do we need different branches of science for different subjects of research? Because the laws of development of the different areas of reality are obviously not the same. Of course, no one would claim that the laws of physics, such as gravity, the law of conservation of mass, etc., do not apply in human society. But these laws are not very useful in the field of society if you want to understand the laws of social development. This therefore shows that although the laws that apply within the three different basic forms of movement cannot contradict each other, they cannot be reduced to each other either. Since the specific nature of the higher forms of movement must not be neglected, the biological and social sciences are just as important as physics and chemistry.

On the basis of the three forms of movement, we have seen that matter does not simply move, but develops. Development means that change takes place from the lower to the higher stage. In other words, the relationships become more complex and give rise to qualitatively new stages of development, each with its own laws of motion. For example, simple light atoms developed into heavier and heavier elements, which in turn made more complex molecular compounds possible. Nucleic acids emerged from carbon compounds, from these emerged amino acids and proteins, cells, multicellular organisms, and finally highly developed organisms such as mammals, whose intelligence developed ever higher with evolution. The development of societies from the lower to the higher can also be observed in history, as we shall see.

Let us now summarize: Dialectical materialism is a world view that assumes that the world is unified and moves according to certain laws that are based on the

contradictory nature of matter.

Dialectical materialism is a partisan philosophy. It consistently opposes both idealism and metaphysical views of the world. We will see that it also takes sides in the class struggle. For by exploring the laws of everything that exists and not stopping at certain "forbidden" questions, by also uncovering the laws of social development, it serves social progress and the interests of the working class. But more on this later.

Working questions:

- **How does materialist dialectics differ from idealist dialectics?**
- **What are the properties of matter?**

Discussion questions:

- **The types of motion we can observe in different areas of matter are very different. For example, electromagnetism is quite different from the orbits of the planets or the withering of a flower. Is dialectical materialism perhaps artificially constructing a commonality that does not exist?**
- **What kind of contradictions exist in socialism? Which ones could exist in communism and drive it to a higher level of development?**

3.4 Knowledge as a reflection of objective reality

Questions of knowledge have always been of great importance in philosophy. The part of philosophy that deals with these questions is called epistemology. There are two fundamental questions in epistemology that the various schools of philosophy have always argued about: Firstly, is there an objective reality, i.e. does the world exist outside our consciousness? Secondly, if so, can this objective reality be expressed in consciousness? Or to put it another way: are our perceptions capable of providing an (at least approximately) true picture of objective reality? A materialist theory of knowledge must inevitably answer both questions in the affirmative: there is an objective reality and we can recognize it.

First of all, this corresponds to what we all assume in our everyday lives, albeit mostly unconsciously. We stop at a red light because we assume that the light is really red and that we might really be hit by a car if we disobey the traffic rules. So we don't assume that our perception of the red light and the traffic are pure illusions of our mind. Nevertheless, there have been and still are various theories that cast doubt on the existence of an objective truth. However, these can be refuted relatively easily. Firstly, the statement "There is no objective truth" is in itself a logical contradiction. Anyone who makes this statement is saying that it is objectively true that there is no objective truth. And secondly, we can test our ideas about reality in practice. We realize that our assumptions about traffic lights

and traffic were correct when we disobey the traffic rules and then experience the consequences.

By acting in accordance with our insights into reality, we objectively experience whether or not our insights essentially correspond to reality. Practice gives our consciousness objective confirmation and thus advances the process of cognition. However, this does not mean that an insight can only be regarded as true if it has been verified in practice. Through abstract thinking, which we will look at in a moment, people are also able to derive new insights from given true knowledge. For example, if we have a basic understanding of how addition works, we do not have to check every single calculation in practice (e.g. using a slide rule), but can also arrive at new insights through purely logical thinking.

3.4.1 A materialist theory of knowledge

As materialists, Marx and Engels naturally also advocated a materialist theory of knowledge. Engels, for example, assumed that the concepts of our thinking, which deal with the forms of existing things, are a reflection of reality. Thinking "can never be created and derived by thought out of itself, but only from the external world" (Engels: Anti-Dühring, MECW 25, p. 34). For: "Not in one single instance, so far, have we been led to the conclusion that our sense-perceptions, scientifically controlled, induce in our minds ideas respecting the outer world that are, by their very nature, at variance with reality, or that there is an inherent incompatibility between the outer world and our sense-perceptions of it" (Engels: Introduction to Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, MECW 29, p. 287). Lenin developed these views further into a more comprehensive theory of knowledge, the theory of reflection. According to this theory, we can visualize the process of cognition as a mirror image.

We can therefore define cognition as the correct reflection of reality in a person's consciousness. This leads directly to the questions: Is there also a false reflection of reality? And is this then not cognition? We will come to this in a moment. But first let's look at how cognition takes place. Because the metaphor "reflection" also has its limits. When we form a picture of reality, we must not imagine it as a photographic snapshot. Rather, knowledge should always be understood as a process. Lenin writes: "*In the theory of knowledge, as in every other sphere of science, we must think dialectically, that is, we must not regard our knowledge as ready-made and unalterable, but must determine how knowledge emerges from ignorance, how incomplete, inexact knowledge becomes more complete and more exact*" (Lenin: Materialism and Empiriocriticism, LCW 14, p. 103). We therefore always have both knowledge and ignorance about certain facts in our heads. We imagine some things incorrectly or too simply, while we may not know anything about other things. As a result, our picture is incomplete. However, as we now know, we can only really understand things if we look at them in their entirety. Ultimately, everything that exists is part of the unified world context. This is why Lenin says:

"*the human conception of cause and effect always somewhat simplifies the objective connection of the phenomena of nature, reflecting it only approximately, artificially isolating one or another aspect of a single world process*" (ibid., p. 156).

3.4.2 Why is truth relative?

Our knowledge of the world can certainly be true, but this is only a relative truth. The absolute truth only exists outside our consciousness in the form of the infinitely comprehensive reality. Our knowledge can approach this absolute truth by accumulating more and more true knowledge and putting it into context. But we can never reach the absolute truth. Why not? Firstly, because reality is infinitely large and complex and it is therefore impossible to recognize all aspects and details of the universe. Secondly, because matter is in constant motion and is therefore constantly changing. However, this means nothing other than that the process of knowledge can never be complete. Since the beginning of mankind, man has constantly increased his knowledge of the world, i.e. transformed his ignorance into knowledge.

This relativity of our knowledge and the truths we recognize is very important. Because it also allows us to take a different view of human history. From today's perspective, it may seem as if previous generations of people were all stupid and ignorant. With this view, however, it is impossible to understand knowledge as a constantly progressing process. It therefore becomes impossible to explain how we arrived at our current level of knowledge in the first place. And we forget that there is still a great deal we do not know today. Let's take an example to illustrate this process: the ancient philosophers Democritus and Leucippus were the first to assume that matter consists of tiny, indivisible particles. They called these atoms, which means "indivisible" in Greek. Today, everyone knows that atoms are not indivisible, so their assumption was wrong. Nevertheless, it was a major scientific advance, even if at the time it was nothing more than a supposition that could not be scientifically proven. It was thousands of years later that the existence of atoms was discovered. From then on, generations of scientists continued to develop new atomic models. To name just a few: Joseph John Thomson's model of the atom as an evenly distributed positive charge with negative electrons moving inside (1903); Ernest Rutherford's model of a positive atomic nucleus with a shell in which the electrons move (1911); Bohr's atomic model (1913) with a positive nucleus and electrons moving in circular orbits; then the atomic model of quantum mechanics, according to which the atomic nuclei and electrons are described by so-called wave functions, from which, for example, the probabilities of residence and the electron motion can be derived. These wave functions can be used, for example, to calculate the probabilities and energies of the particles. We can therefore see that, despite certain incomplete and incorrect assumptions, it would be inappropriate to simply discard the earlier stages of knowledge as false. It makes more sense to understand them as stages in a process of cognition that, like everything else, ascends from the lower to the higher.

3.4.3 How perception becomes knowledge

Our knowledge of the world comes from perception. So are perception and cognition the same thing? No. Because knowledge does not only include what we take in through our sensory organs, i.e. our eyes, ears, etc. If that were the case, we would virtually drown in the endless flood of information that flows into us. We would not even be able to store this mass of information, let alone somehow find our way through it. The human mind (and many animals at a lower level) is able to establish connections between the individual sensory facts and generalize them. Even sensations via the sensory organs are combinations of several stimuli that indicate the existence of complex phenomena. We do not perceive each color stimulus, each particle of light in the eye individually, but rather a composite image is presented to us. People then use this to form concepts that summarize these connections and highlight the essence of what is at stake.

When we say: "This is a dog", we are talking about a very specific animal. However, we are assigning it to the general category of "dog". We are talking about an abstraction here: the individual dog is concrete, an individual. The term "dog", on the other hand, refers to a whole group of animals and not a specific dog. Abstraction comes from Latin and means that the specific characteristics of a thing are subtracted and only the general remains. So it is not important whether the dog is large or small, black or brown, etc. However, the assignment of this particular animal to the category of dog is not arbitrary, it is not a mere figment of the imagination. It is itself also a reflection of a real, material fact, namely that all dogs have common genetic material, can reproduce with each other, have a similar predatory bite, in short: belong to the same animal species. Abstractions are therefore not purely ideal, created in our heads, but our abstract concepts are also reflections of material relationships. Conceptual thinking, which can abstract and establish connections (e.g. causal relationships), is a necessary prerequisite for systematic knowledge and thus also for the progress of technology and ultimately for social interaction. Lenin says: "*Thought proceeding from the concrete to the abstract — provided it is correct […] — does not get away from the truth but comes closer to it. The abstraction of matter, of a law of nature, the abstraction of value, etc., in short all scientific (correct, serious, not absurd) abstractions reflect nature more deeply, truly and completely.*" (Lenin: Conspectus on the 'Science of Logic', LCW 38, p. 171). Cognition is therefore not mere perception, but a dialectical unity of perception and conceptual thinking, whereby both presuppose and influence each other. The insights gained from this guide people in practice. Their actions are based on the knowledge they have gained about their environment.

3.4.4 Are reflections always correct?

Now back to the question of whether the reflection in our head is always correct. Everyone will spontaneously answer this question in the negative. Everyone is familiar with sensory illusions, e.g. optical illusions. However, the fact that such

things exist does not mean that we can no longer rely on our senses. After all, they have evolved in such a way that they generally provide the correct information necessary for survival. What's more, we have several sensory organs, so that the deception of one sensory organ is usually quickly revealed by the others.

But even conceptualizations do not necessarily have to be a true reflection of reality. For example, some people believe in ghosts. But there are no ghosts, so the term ghost is not a true reflection of an actually existing phenomenon. The belief of many bourgeois economists in a "self-regulating market" that is automatically always in equilibrium and does not generate crises of its own accord is comparable.

When Marxists say that knowledge is an image or reflection of objective reality, they do not mean that this reflection is always correct. We have already established that our knowledge is always incomplete. In the following chapter, we will also see that it is always historically conditioned. But of course it can also simply be wrong. In fact, it is part of the lawful functioning of capitalist society that it regularly produces false consciousness, i.e. that people by no means recognize the true laws of capitalism. Lenin also pointed this out in his theory of knowledge: "*Social being and social consciousness are not identical, just as being in general and consciousness in general are not identical. From the fact that in their intercourse men act as conscious beings, it does not follow at all that social consciousness is identical with social being. In all social formations of any complexity — and in the capitalist social formation in particular — people in their intercourse are* ***not conscious of what kind of social relations are being formed, in accordance with what laws they develop, etc.***" (Lenin: Materialism and Empiriocriticism, LCW 14, p. 323, emphasis added).

So what is the point of the term "reflection"? Does it not suggest an oversimplified idea that our picture of reality must always be correct? First of all, the concept of "reflection" primarily emphasizes that the images of our perception, and therefore also our knowledge, come from material reality and attempt to approximate it. However, even a mirror image is not exactly true to reality, starting with the fact that it is mirror-inverted. With a concave or convex mirror, the image is also distorted. If the mirror is dirty, it becomes inaccurate, etc. And in a figurative sense, it is the same with our cognition. Depending on how well our sensory organs are trained, which aids we use, how comprehensive our knowledge of the world is, how suitable or unsuitable our theoretical assumptions about the world are, the image of reality that we receive is better or worse, closer or further away from the truth. But it is and remains a reflection of reality.

3.4.5 The concept of reflection in dialectical materialism

Let us summarize: By the dialectical materialist concept of reflection as the basis of cognition we mean: First, that the object of the image also exists without the image, but the image does not exist without the depicted object. Secondly, that the reflection arises through the effect of objective reality on the sensory organs and is then processed into the content of consciousness. Thirdly, that the image in the mind and the depicted object are not the same, since the object exists materially, while the image is only ideal. Nevertheless, the image can give us reliable information about the world. Fourthly, that knowledge can only take place as a process of approaching the absolute truth without ever being able to reach it. Fifthly, that reflection does not necessarily mean that the image in our head also corresponds to the object, i.e. that our perceptions can be wrong. And sixthly, that we can check the reliability of the images through practice.

We have now dealt with the theory of reflection as a theory of knowledge. However, Lenin does not limit the concept of reflection to the question of cognition, i.e. the question of how the contents of our consciousness come about. He says: "*But it is logical to assume that all matter possesses a property that is essentially related to sensation, the property of reflection*" (ibid., p. 85).

How is this to be understood? We have already established that the world is to be understood as an all-encompassing overall context, as a structure of infinitely many relationships between the individual things. But because everything interacts with each other, every single thing leaves its mark on the other things. As one thing influences another, it changes it, leaving its mark on it. For example, insects have become smaller and smaller over the course of the earth's history because the oxygen content of the atmosphere decreased and was therefore no longer sufficient to supply their large bodies. So you could say that the change in the chemical composition is reflected in the change in the insects' organisms. Another example: in the Middle Ages, the European states fought many wars against the Arab kingdoms. But there was also trade and cultural exchange. As a result of this interaction, some Arabic words were adopted into European languages, including German: e.g. alcohol, sugar or sofa. Here too, one culture is reflected in the other through centuries of interaction.

It can therefore be seen that the type of reflection through which knowledge comes about is ultimately only a special form of the general process of reflection: namely conscious reflection with the help of the senses and the human ability to think. We can therefore recognize things because they have an effect on us anyway and our senses are able to make us aware of this effect (reflection).

Working questions:

- **How can we check whether our perceptions and perceptions correspond to objective reality?**
- **What does the term "reflection" mean in epistemology?**

Discussion question:

- **Does it make sense to speak of cognition as a "reflection" of objective reality?**

3.5 Historical materialism

As we have seen, dialectical materialism deals with the laws of development of everything that exists: The laws according to which matter moves in nature, according to which consciousness arises from matter and is determined by it. Neither materialism nor dialectics were an invention of Marxism. Both have existed in various forms in philosophical thought for thousands of years. The connection between dialectics and materialism is also nothing new in principle. Ancient philosophers such as Heraclitus and Aristotle already combined materialistic tendencies with early forms of dialectical thinking.

The great achievement of the founders of Marxism lies in having developed a consistent, i.e. self-contained and comprehensive, dialectical materialist view of the world. Unlike earlier philosophical systems, the dialectical materialism of Marx, Engels and Lenin no longer accepts any idealistic or anti-dialectical views. And unlike earlier materialist philosophies, dialectical materialism for the first time really considers the whole world as a dialectically developing material context. The whole world, however, means not only nature, but also human society. Marx and Engels were the first to examine the laws of social development from a dialectical materialist perspective. This view of history is known as historical materialism. Historical materialism is a sub-area of dialectical materialism: the history of human society requires independent scientific investigation, i.e. the analysis of society is not completed by the natural sciences. But neither can it be viewed in isolation from the overall context of the development of matter. Nature and society are interrelated. Society is shaped in many ways by the natural conditions under which it exists: by human biology (metabolism, sexuality, the development of mental abilities, the urge to form communities, etc.), but also by geographical, climatic and other conditions. Conversely, however, humans also intervene in their natural environment, as we will see.

3.5.1 Regularities

Historical materialism is therefore the science of the laws of historical developments. It therefore assumes that history also proceeds according to certain laws

that can be recognized through scientific analysis. As in nature, Marxism also assumes in relation to history that the driving forces behind the development of a thing lie within it, i.e. that development is not something that is determined solely by external forces. Societies therefore develop through their inherent contradictions and not because some higher power directs the destinies of people. As Engels noted, with historical materialism "*idealism was driven from its last refuge, the philosophy of history [...] and a method [was] found of explaining man's ' knowing' by his ' being', instead of, as heretofore, his ' being ' by his ' knowing ' "* (Engels: Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, MECW 24, p. 304).

In its development, consciousness is materially determined in two ways: Firstly, it was the physical development of human beings, their richer diet, the more complex activities and interpersonal relationships that stimulated the development of the brain and thus enabled more complicated thoughts. Secondly, the development of human thought through the ages is also the intellectual expression of the development of human societies.

What is meant when we talk about social laws? Is it meant in the same sense that nature is structured according to laws? Yes and no. No, because social or historical laws, unlike the laws of nature, are of course not detached from human action. The laws of physics or biology are not created by the actions of humans, but were already valid when there were no humans and would continue to apply if humans were to die out. The situation is different with social laws: These are carried out by conscious people; they are the result of the interaction of many individuals, each pursuing their own intentions and purposes with their actions.

On the other hand, social laws are also comparable to the laws of nature. For even if there are conscious human beings behind social laws, these laws nevertheless prevail independently of the will of human beings as long as the social conditions that produced them exist. How is this to be understood? In the sense that individuals cannot make the world the way they like it, but must act under conditions that are the result of a lawful historical development. These laws in turn come about through the interaction of many individuals and the goals that the individual pursues do not necessarily lead to the result that was aimed for. Marx says: "*Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past*." (Marx: The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, MECW 11, p. 103). The fact that people make their history therefore does not mean that they are always aware of the social foundations and effects of their actions.

This connection should become clearer below. However, an example may be helpful: Imagine a farmer who wants to sell her vegetables at the weekly market. Of course she wants to get as much money as possible for her produce, because she and her family have worked all year to bring in the harvest. But she can't set the price at will. She is not alone in the world, but enters the market as an actor, and

this market follows rules. The competition between the different sellers and buyers on the market means that a certain price level is set objectively—"objectively" means that it was not a conscious decision by a single person that determined this level, but that it has emerged from the interaction of many people without a central decision. We will see in chapter 4.2 that it is ultimately and indirectly the average necessary labor time that determines the price of goods. In any case, our farmer is forced to orient herself to this objectively determined price level. If she deviates significantly upwards, she will no longer find buyers. If she lowers the price too much, she will no longer be able to feed herself and her family and will no longer be able to replace the tools, seeds, etc. she has used. Price formation is therefore an example of a social law in which the many individual wills of people lead to a different result.

Objective social laws differ from the laws of nature in that they are not valid independently of the will of people, but apply depending on the level of development of society and the prevailing social order. For example, the special laws of capitalism naturally no longer apply once capitalism has been overcome and socialism has been established. On the other hand, the objective laws cannot be changed or suspended at will. As long as we live under capitalism, the laws of capitalism will apply and determine our lives. Through deliberate political intervention, governments can change the operation of one law or another by temporarily slowing down or speeding up a particular development. But they cannot override the fundamental laws.

There are both general historical laws that apply in all societies and specific laws that only apply in some forms of society. The example of the vegetable market describes a specific law. This is because not all societies have markets where goods are bought and sold. A market presupposes that production takes place under the conditions of private property and that the private owners must then exchange their goods. In chapter 4, we will look in detail at the laws according to which capitalism functions. However, we will also get to know examples of general historical laws.

Let us summarize at this point: Historical materialism is the view of history founded by Marx and Engels, according to which human society also develops according to the basic laws of dialectics (chapter 3.2) and the development of the material, economic conditions of society is the fundamental factor, while the development of all other areas of society such as philosophy, religion, art, politics, etc. is dependent on economic development.

Historical materialism focuses on the historical process as a whole, as a lawful overall context, instead of, like bourgeois historiography, understanding history merely as a series of dates and events in which only a partial connection is seen. This is why bourgeois science only ever recognizes individual problems in capitalism, which are attributed to isolated causes such as wrong policies or the misconduct of individuals. Only historical materialism is able to recognize the

overall context of the capitalist mode of production behind the individual problems that make life difficult for people.

3.5.2 Productive forces

How is it to be understood that society is dependent on economic development? First of all, in a very fundamental sense. "*Marx described it as the fundamental fact of society that people must first eat, drink, live and clothe themselves before they can engage in politics, satisfy artistic inclinations or write philosophical treatises. This is apparently self-evident. But in reality, it was an epoch-making discovery, from which the main conclusion follows: In order to live, people have to work, to produce their means of existence. Without production, no society could exist. Therefore, the production of the immediate material means of existence and the degree of economic development achieved by a people or during a historical epoch form the basis on which forms of government, legal relations, art, etc. develop.*" (Introduction to Dialectical and Historical Materialism, p. 298).

Labor is therefore a fundamental necessity of every society and of human life in general. Marx and Engels understand labor as a conscious activity through which people change their given environment according to their purposes. Humans find the prerequisites in nature to ensure their survival and satisfy their other needs. However, in most cases it is necessary to work on the objects found in nature in order to make them usable for humans: trees must first be felled and the wood sawn, stone must be hewn from the quarry, cows are modified by breeding over many generations so that they give more milk, and so on.

For Marx and Engels, work is the decisive activity that defines human beings. It is true that many animals also "work" their environment for the purpose of survival or reproduction. But Marx writes: "*A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process, we get a result that already existed in the imagi- nation of the labourer at its commencement.*" (Marx: Capital, Volume I, MECW 35, p. 188).

Labor in this sense is therefore to be understood as an activity guided by consciousness. Through work, man realizes his purposes in relation to the material world in which he lives. It is the basis of his satisfaction of needs and his relationship to other people. It is therefore wrong to see work in a purely negative light, simply as toil and loss of time. The fact that work in our society mostly has this character is rather due to its capitalist form. Under capitalism, it is alienated labor because it does not serve the development of human beings, but rather their domination and the profits of the bourgeoisie.

The things that people change through their labor are called objects of labor.

The instruments with which the objects are processed are called means of labor. The means of labor and objects of labor taken together, i.e. all the things that people need in order to be able to work to satisfy their needs, are called **means of production**: means of production, i.e. the raw materials, already processed semi-finished products, but also the tools and machines, the land, the production and storage buildings, means of transportation and infrastructure. Through work, people enter into a relationship, a metabolism with nature. Work changes both nature and people at the same time. For example, the development of the work process to ever higher technical levels also changes the way in which people perceive and think about their social and natural environment. This expansion of our senses through social development can also, but not only, be understood directly in physical terms: The telescope allows us to explore outer space, the electron microscope that of the microcosm (i.e. the tiny components of matter) and through today's modern physics we know some things about the world that directly contradict everyday common sense, such as that spaces can curve or that time passes at different speeds in different places.

People and the means of production with which they work to produce all the goods we need to live in the broadest sense are therefore the two "ingredients" of production, the productive force of society. This is why they are called **productive forces**. However, the means of production alone are not sufficient for production; people are always required for this as well. A means or object of labor alone is useless and even deteriorates over time. Therefore, man is the most important productive force.

The productive forces do not remain the same, but are constantly evolving. This applies to the objects of work as well as to the means of work and people themselves. The first tools with which humans worked the world, for example by hunting animals and using their meat and fur, were made of stone and wood. People moved around as nomads for hundreds of thousands of years and were only able to extract the bare necessities from nature in order to survive.

The development of productive forces was still very slow over this period, which accounts for most of human history, and was only noticeable over thousands of generations or even longer periods of time. Humanity then made a qualitative leap forward around 12,000 years ago with the so-called "Neolithic Revolution", a term that is less commonly used today. People began to grow crops and keep livestock. As a result, they broke away from the nomadic way of life and became sedentary. In the following millennia, they began to develop the production of food and tools, started constructing buildings, etc. Contrary to what the word "revolution" might suggest, this was still a lengthy process that took many millennia and which we refer to as the Neolithic period because the main tools were still made of stone.

The next major step was metallurgy, i.e. the discovery and processing of metals. At first this was mainly bronze, later iron took its place. These eras are known as

the Bronze and Iron Ages after the predominant material used for tools. Work became more specialized and the social division of labour increased more and more, and the exchange between communities in the form of trade was transformed from an accidental, one-off act into a regular one, leading to a further differentiation in the division of labour between members of society. With the emergence of a surplus product above the absolute social minimum, it becomes interesting to keep prisoners of war as slaves on the one hand, and on the other, groups of people separate themselves from the actual production process. A social superstructure is created; the surplus product created by the producers creates a group of people above the producers who appropriate this surplus product. This exploitation of labor power creates structures of domination to secure it. The state with oppressed and oppressors emerges and with it a multitude of labor tasks that the small, clan-based mode of production of primitive society did not know.

Alongside the development of agriculture, the first cities emerged. Politics and administration became more complex, eventually giving rise to powerful empires such as those of the Babylonians, Egyptians, Chinese and Persians or, in late antiquity, the Hellenistic empires and the Roman Empire.

With the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 4th and 5th centuries AD, the so-called Middle Ages began in Europe. At first glance, the Middle Ages appear to be a huge economic and civilizational step backwards compared to antiquity. Many people picture this era as a time of darkness, superstition and economic regression. From a longer-term and global perspective, however, the picture is more nuanced. In China, the Arab world and the Byzantine Empire, for example, science and culture developed considerably. The Middle Ages in Western and Central Europe also saw drastic developments in productive forces: for example, the wheeled plough in agriculture, the horseshoe, the use of wind and water power to grind grain and the transition of land cultivation to three-field farming, i.e. the alternating cultivation of fields, whereby only two out of three fields were cultivated at a time so that the soil on the third field could recover. These developments enabled large increases in harvests, improved nutrition, faster travel and trade, etc. Over the centuries, trade routes and towns were built everywhere, even in Western and Central Europe, which was still very underdeveloped at the time. The population grew rapidly because improved production techniques meant that more people could be fed. In the late Middle Ages, gunpowder revolutionized war technology and printing created new foundations for science. Ever finer craftsmanship became possible, enabling the production of complex devices such as clocks and telescopes. The dawn of the modern capitalist era was finally heralded by new methods of iron and steel processing, increasingly efficient spinning machines for textile production and, finally, new sources of power such as the steam engine. The factory system also gave rise to a new form of work organization that replaced the previous small-scale crafts. In just a few centuries, the technical level of today's world developed at a rapid pace, with computers, satellites, particle accelerators and high-speed trains.

The development of the productive forces was a development of all productive forces: the objects of labor became ever more numerous and required ever more prior processing. The means of work also became more numerous and more complex, and they also required more and more work. And perhaps most of all, people themselves have changed as a result of all this: Not only physically, for example, in that they are on average much taller today than they were a few centuries ago due to better nutrition. But above all in terms of culture, scientific access to the world, everyday working life, consumption, in short: the entire social structure. The development of production techniques allowed for much greater population growth, which in turn enabled the formation of cities on a large scale and thus the factory-like mass production of today's capitalism. Different aspects of the progress of the productive forces thus interacted and promoted each other.

The **development of the productive forces from the lower to the higher** can be observed throughout human history as a general historical law. For a long time, this tendency was only driven by man's immediate desire to make the everyday struggle for survival easier, but social circumstances also increasingly played a role in the development of productive forces. Through the social division of labour and state-organized measures such as the construction of roads and irrigation systems, etc., the progress of the productive forces could already be extraordinarily accelerated in early antiquity. Finally, in capitalist society, competition between companies is a driver of technical progress. However, this is not to be understood in absolute terms: Capitalism also partly slows down progress, especially in its monopolistic stage (chapter 4.7). But despite these different conditions and aspects of the development of productive forces, this development runs through all epochs. It is the most fundamental, most revolutionary element of social development: Throughout history, the conditions under which human beings work and produce the material life process of society have been in a constant state of upheaval. As a result, the forms of transportation and exchange, the relationships between people, social structures, cultural and intellectual phenomena as well as politics and the state have constantly changed. On the one hand, this adaptation of the entire social development to the progress of the productive forces was necessary in order to enable further development, for example because new production techniques required a greater concentration of workers and therefore made it necessary to live together in cities. On the other hand, it was also a more or less unconscious consequence of society becoming ever more complex, larger and richer in material terms. This led to new ways of thinking about the world, more highly developed art and literature, but also, for example, more efficient killing methods in war technology.

3.5.3 Production relations

Even if the development of the productive forces is the fundamental driving law of human history, social development also consists of other elements. Throughout history, the development of productive forces has taken place under very dif-

ferent conditions, in very differently structured societies.

For the longest time, people lived in small, itinerant communities in which the few goods were shared and did not belong to individuals. This primitive society was therefore based on the simple cooperation of people on the basis of a roughly equal distribution of the products of labor. The basic economic law of this "primitive communist" society therefore consisted of the roughly equal distribution of goods to secure people's livelihoods at a low level with the help of primitive instruments of production.

In so-called antiquity, however, private ownership of the means of production prevailed—and not only of these, but also of people themselves. Some of the people, mostly prisoners of war from other peoples, not only did not own the means of production, but were themselves property—slaves. This slave-owning society, as it existed in ancient Rome, for example, but also in other states, had a large number of different groups: In addition to the slaves and the slaveholders, there were also free but non-owning classes of people. The prerequisite for the emergence of the slave-owning society was that the productive forces had developed to such an extent that it was possible not only to ensure bare survival, but also to produce a surplus that could be appropriated by an owning class. This class of slave owners was able to make a living and, to an increasing extent, also their luxuries through the exploitation of slaves. The basic economic law of the slaveholding society was that the surplus product was appropriated by the slaveholders through the exploitation of the slaves, based on the slaveholders' ownership of the means of production and the slaves.

The so-called Middle Ages were essentially characterized by the system of feudalism, even though forms of common property and slavery continued to exist. In feudalism, the relationship between unfree peasants and feudal lords was decisive: although the peasants were no longer slaves, they could not be bought and sold or moved to another location at will. They also owned their own tools, e.g. farming equipment and livestock, and were able to spend part of their time working for themselves and their families. At the same time, however, they were unfree in that they were not allowed to leave the place where they lived of their own free will. As serfs, they were subject to a lord to whom they had to render services—either in the form of taxes or by doing part of their work directly on the lord's land. The noble feudal lords, on the other hand, were not a uniform class, but were highly stratified and subdivided: On the one hand, the nobility was divided into clerical and secular nobility, both of whom benefited from the feudal system. On the other hand, the nobility was highly differentiated socially: From minor knights, some of whom lived in relative poverty themselves, to immensely wealthy dukes, kings, bishops and cardinals. The king bestowed power and titles on the lower-ranking princes as well as the disposal of a certain amount of land and the peasants living on it. The power of the various groups of feudal lords was based on this ownership of land and the associated rule over the associated peasants. In return for being granted this power, the lords followed the king to war with their soldiers. Feu-

dalism was characterized by a decentralization of rule, because it was exercised locally not by the central state but by the feudal lords. We can formulate the basic economic law of the feudal order as follows: the class of feudal lords appropriated the surplus product for their consumption by exploiting the peasants on the basis of their ownership of the land and their rule over the serf peasants, who thus also constituted the property of the feudal lords to a certain, limited degree. However, the exact forms of feudalism differed greatly from region to region and feudalism did not prevail everywhere in the world.

Finally, capitalism is a society in which there is normally no longer a legal division between slaves, serfs and free people, even if slavery still exists de facto. Everyone is equal before the law, at least according to the wording. Nevertheless, the separation into rich and poor is by no means abolished, but rather taken to the extreme. We will see in chapter 4 exactly how capitalism is structured and according to which laws it develops.

The ideologues of capitalism often like to claim that there can be no other society than capitalism. This is obviously a lie, as humanity has lived without capitalism for well over 99% of its existence. But it is also wrong because capitalism is not the end of history. It too will perish one day. And either humanity will perish with it, or it will create a new form of society: The socialist or communist society, which we will look at in chapter 9.

In Marxist textbooks and overviews of world history, we often find the division of human societies into the following stages of development:

- The primitive society or "primitive communism"
- The slave-owning society in the epoch known as antiquity
- Feudalism in the era known as the Middle Ages
- Capitalism
- And finally, the socialist and communist societies

However, the historical development of societies naturally differed from country to country and region to region and cannot be described exhaustively in a simple scheme. For example, a feudalistic order did not develop in all countries. And even in those countries where we find the basic elements of a feudal society, there were major differences. Roughly speaking, we can at least say that in all countries social development began in a form of primitive society and has now arrived at capitalism, and that in all countries the next stage of social development after capitalism must be socialism.

There are therefore different, historically developing stages of social production. They are historical stages because the people of an epoch can make use of the accumulated knowledge of their ancestors and develop it further. In other words,

each generation does not start "from scratch", but builds on what is already there. Production is social because it is not simply the sum of producers working independently of each other—people divide up work, specialize and thus save huge amounts of working time instead of everyone doing everything. It is absolutely impossible for a person to study medicine and become a doctor if he has to work in the fields all day, cut wood for his hut, hunt animals and make clothes from their leather, etc. at the same time. An important indicator of the degree of development of a society is the degree of social division of labor.

However, the most important distinguishing feature of the different historical epochs is another one, which has already been mentioned: Namely, the relationship of people to the means of production.

Marx writes: "*In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness*." (Marx: Preface to the Critique of Political Economy, MECW 29, p. 263).

What does Marx mean by this? First of all, he says that every society is based on a certain way of organizing production. These social relations are independent of human will, in the sense that they have their own logic of development—a self-movement in the dialectical sense (see chapter 3.2)—and are not controlled in their development from a central point.

In any case, Marx calls these relations **relations of production**. The relationship of production, i.e. the relationship that people have to the means of production, always results in a relationship between people: for example, in the slave-owning society, the ownership of the land, mines, etc. by the slave owners also went hand in hand with the ownership of the slaves. In capitalism, too, the power of the ruling class is based on the ownership of the means of production, just as the oppression of the working class is based on the non-ownership of the means of production (see chapter 4). Therefore, property relations are only the legal expression of the relations of production that essentially determine the social structure.

Marx also states that the relations of production correspond to a certain stage of development of the productive forces. This is to be understood in both directions: On the one hand, certain productive forces only emerge under a higher stage of the relations of production: Under feudal relations of production, for example, large-scale industrial production was not possible because the mass of working people lived as peasants on the land, because there was a lack of economic competition among producers and insufficient incentive to introduce new technologies, but also because the state was far too decentralized due to the feudal system to support the development of an industry and meet the high regulatory requirements of an industrial society, etc. Airplanes, rockets, high-speed trains,

all this would have been impossible under feudalism. It follows that once feudalism reached a certain level of development of the productive forces, it became an obstacle to the further development of the productive forces, just like the ancient slave-owning society before it. There had to be an economic upheaval, the emergence of new relations of production had become necessary. At first, capitalism developed under feudal rule, especially in the cities of Europe, which were relatively independent and therefore offered the emerging new social class the necessary leeway it needed for its slow rise. This new class was the bourgeoisie, the class of capitalists.

We have already seen above that the development of the productive forces from the lower to the higher is a fundamental historical law. Now we understand that this development is not to be understood simply in technical terms, i.e. in the sense that new technologies and working methods are invented. Rather, the productive forces can only be understood in their social context and, with historical development, an increase in the social character of the productive forces can be observed. This means that the more the productive forces develop, the less they can be applied by individuals and increasingly only by society as a whole. We will see that under the capitalist mode of production this developmental tendency reaches a higher level than ever before, thereby increasing the contradiction between this social character of production and the private ownership of the means of production.

We thus see that productive forces and relations of production are closely interrelated. Certain relations of production also correspond to a certain level of development of the productive forces. However, this also means that with the further development of the productive forces, these relations of production inevitably become historically obsolete at a certain point; they must be broken up and replaced by new relations of production. Marxism refers to this unity of productive forces and relations of production in a particular historical epoch and the lawful relationship between the two as the **mode of production**.

3.5.4 Base and superstructure

The five types of production relations mentioned above can be divided into two groups: In two of the forms of society mentioned, namely the society of original common property (also called "primitive communism") and in the socialist/communist society, there is no private ownership of the means of production and also no group of people who can thereby rule over other people. What the slave-owning society, feudalism and the capitalist mode of production have in common is that there is a small group of people who own the most important means of production and can use them to force the mass of working people to work for them. These three forms of society are class societies. In each case, there are one or more exploiting classes that live off the labor of the majority of society, i.e. exploit it. What is meant by exploitation?

As the progress of the productive forces made it possible to secure more than just immediate survival, a special class of people was able to emerge who did not have to be active in the production process themselves, but were able to make a living from the surplus generated by the mass of working people. In the slave-owning society, this meant that the slaves had to work much longer and harder than would have been necessary if they had only had to feed themselves. In practice, they only worked part of the time for themselves and part of the working day for their master. For the serfs, this division of the working day became even more visible, for example by spending the second part of the working day directly on the lord's field. As we will see later, it is no different for the working class under capitalism. The working time that a slave, serf or modern proletarian performed beyond the part of the working day that was necessary to satisfy his vital needs is what Marx calls **overtime**. If there is a class (e.g. slave owners) that appropriates the surplus labor of another class (e.g. slaves) or their products (because the slave no longer owned the product of his labor), then this is **exploitation**. Marx's concept of exploitation is therefore not moral; it does not refer to "particularly bad working conditions" or child labor or overwork due to the 14-hour day. Exploitation is a scientifically objective term that simply describes the relationship between two groups of people, one of whom works for the other and performs overtime. The particular form that exploitation takes in capitalism will be a central theme of the next chapter. Whether exploitation of labor power takes place in a society and what forms it takes are the decisive distinguishing features of different modes of production.

Because economic relations, i.e. the relations of production and productive forces, are the determining factor in social development, Marx also refers to them as the **basis** of society. The economic basis includes the relations of production and ownership, the forms of distribution and exchange of the wealth produced and the division of society into classes and strata. Just as a house would fall to the ground and break if its foundations were removed, a society is not possible without its basis, i.e. without work. As has been shown, the development of the social basis follows certain historical laws, such as the development of the productive forces and the unity of productive forces and relations of production.

However, since even a foundation makes little sense if you don't build a house on top of it, the social basis always corresponds to a social **superstructure** that can be subdivided into several parts. Certain relations of production require certain laws and certain laws require certain state apparatuses to ensure that they are observed. Feudalism required a state authority that forced the serf peasants to remain on the land on which they were born and to perform labor services in the fields of their lords. In the feudal state, people were not equal before the law, but were divided into different groups with different rights. Capitalism is based on the free movement of labor and on contracts between formal equals, so the bourgeois (capitalist) state no longer protects class privileges, but continues to protect private property. State and political structures form the political part of the superstructure.

But the ideas of an epoch are also dependent on the economic basis. Of course, this does not mean that all people in a particular society always think exactly the same. After all, people have different positions within society, they have different experiences based on this and therefore come to different opinions and conclusions. Therefore, the different classes also tend to differ according to their prevailing ideas. Nevertheless, there are dominant ideas in every society. Which ideas can become the dominant ideology depends on the prevailing mode of production and the class that rules it. In capitalism, this is the bourgeois ideology in its different variants, all of which ultimately praise capitalism as the best, often enough even the only possible form of society. So there is also an ideological part of the superstructure. Culture in the broadest sense, science, etc. can also be included in this part. On the one hand, the superstructure includes political, legal, ideological and moral ideas and conceptions that are formed on the basis of material social conditions. On the other hand, it also includes political, legal or cultural institutions such as state apparatuses, parties and organizations, cultural and educational institutions.

The fact that Marxism speaks of the basis and superstructure of society does not mean that this refers to a one-sided cause-and-effect relationship. Marx, Engels and Lenin always emphasized that the superstructure has an effect on the base in many respects and can even trigger profound upheavals at the base. For example, in socialist society, where elements of the superstructure, especially the communist party and socialist ideology, are more important for the transformation of conditions than in past social orders. What is meant by the term basis is only that the historical laws that determine the development of societies and the transition from one form of society to the next are to be found in the area of material production and not in people's ideas. However, the basis and superstructure also form a dialectical unity in which both sides influence each other in their development. Engels writes about this:

"*According to the materialist view of history, the determining factor in history is, in the final analysis, the production and reproduction of actual life. More than that was never maintained either by Marx or myself. Now if someone distorts this by declaring the economic moment to be the only determining factor, he changes that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, ridiculous piece of jargon. The economic situation is the basis, but the various factors of the superstructure — political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, namely constitutions set up by the ruling class after a victorious battle, etc., forms of law and, the reflections of all these real struggles in the minds of the participants, i. e. political, philosophical and legal theories, religious views and the expansion of the same into dogmatic systems — all these factors also have a bearing on the course of the historical struggles of which, in many cases, they largely determine the form. It is in the interaction of all these factors and amidst an unending multitude of fortuities [...] that the economic trend ultimately asserts itself as something inevitable.*" (Engels: To Joseph Bloch in Königsberg, MECW 49, p. 34-35).

3.5.5 Classes and class struggle

"*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 relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in 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. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.*" (Lenin: The Great Initiative, LCW 29, p. 421)

Classes are thus differentiated according to their position within the production order of society, i.e. their ownership and power of disposal over the means of production, and only derived from this according to the share of social wealth they receive. In all societies based on exploitation, there are classes with opposing interests. The exploiting classes strive to appropriate as much surplus labor as possible from the exploited classes. To achieve this, they squeeze the exploited classes as much as possible. In all class societies, there was therefore a constant struggle between the opposing classes: the **class struggle**. The Roman Empire, for example, was shaken by countless slave revolts and several major civil wars between slaves and their slave owners, such as the two slave wars in Sicily and the Spartacus revolt. There were also constant political conflicts in the cities between the ruling class of patricians and the free but propertyless plebeians.

Feudalism also saw various forms of class struggle, e.g. in the form of peasant wars and revolts, conflicts between the lower and higher nobility and between the church and the secular nobility, the struggle of the cities for their freedom from feudal oppression, etc.

Finally, under capitalism, the class struggle came to a head because the whole of society was polarized into two opposing camps: The class of capital owners, the bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and the working class, which has no private ownership of the means of production, on the other. Although there are still intermediate classes such as the petty bourgeoisie, these always tend to be in one camp or the other. The two main classes are engaged in a constant struggle over the level of wages, the length of the working day, the right to unionize and rights in the workplace. But also on a political level for political rights, such as against the privileges of the ruling class, against political repression, against the wars of the bourgeoisie and for universal suffrage, which was only achieved for women in Germany in 1918 through the struggle of the workers' movement. And finally, the class struggle also takes place on an ideological level, as a confrontation between the different variants of the ideology of the bourgeoisie and the world view of the working class, Marxism-Leninism. Marxism-Leninism is the world view of the working class, even if by no means all workers support it or even know it. Its class character results from the fact that it—and only it—consistently expresses the interests of the working class and fights for the liberation of the working class

from exploitation by capital.

However, the existence of classes does not, of course, mean that they automatically develop a sense of belonging together as a class, an understanding of the fact and causes of exploitation and an awareness of the need for revolution—this awareness is called **class consciousness**. Marx described a class that exists objectively as a group of people, but does not necessarily have a class consciousness, as a **class in itself**. If it becomes aware of the causes of its oppression and strives to overcome them in struggle, it becomes a **class for itself** (Marx: Poverty of Philosophy, MECW 6, p. 206-212).

3.5.6 Revolution

The class struggle was not only discovered by Marx and Engels. The Greek philosopher Plato already wrote about the fact that in every city there would be two opposing classes, namely the camp of the rich against that of the poor. Moreover, the slave owners would not have to fear the slaves only because they had state power on their side. However, Marx and Engels discovered the laws of the various modes of production that necessarily give rise to the class struggle. And they show that the class struggle does not simply take place as an endless tug-of-war within a framework that is always the same, but that it always pushes towards a solution: Towards the replacement of the ruling mode of production by a new one. We call this transition to a new mode of production, which goes hand in hand with a qualitative transformation of society as a whole, a **revolution**.

Historical materialism therefore does not explain revolutions, as some bourgeois historiography does, as the result of the deeds of great men or the spread of subversive ideas. Of course, individual men and women can play an important role and of course revolutions are guided by certain ideas. But this analysis falls far too short. After all, why do subversive ideas arise in the first place and how can they become so influential that they can unhinge an entire social order? Marx and Engels argued that we need to look at how the conditions for the emergence of a new society are already maturing in the old one.

This revolutionary process has two sides: On the one hand, the productive forces inevitably develop to a certain point where they become incompatible with the prevailing relations of production. In feudalism, it was the emergence of the first forms of mass production in the manufactories that dealt the deathblow to the system: the attachment of the mass of working people to the land they worked was no longer compatible with the requirements of factory production, which was dependent on a growing urban population and a mobile workforce. On the other hand, the old, still predominant mode of production also creates the social forces that will be behind the revolution. In feudalism, this was above all the newly emerged bourgeoisie, which was striving for free economic development and was hindered by the various privileges of the nobility and restrictions on economic transactions (guilds, royal privileges, serfdom, etc.).

A revolution in the mode of production is such a fundamental change in the economic processes and class structure of society that it cannot remain without corresponding political consequences. This was also the case with the emergence of capitalism: the old ruling apparatus of feudalism was no longer appropriate for the emerging capitalism. The emergence of industry and with it the labour movement, which began to fight for its interests and organize itself, made a new state necessary. The bourgeoisie was no longer satisfied with the limited freedoms that feudalism had left them; they wanted their own state with their own rule. In all developed countries, a struggle broke out between the newly rising bourgeoisie and the old nobility and royal houses. The bourgeoisie had already revolutionized (transformed) economic and social life and created a new social structure. Now it also became the driving force behind political revolutions. These took different forms—in France, for example, the revolution was comparatively radical, with the abolition of the monarchy and aristocratic privileges and the execution of the king. In Germany and England, on the other hand, the monarchies were only restricted and the king's rule was made dependent on parliament (and thus indirectly on the political representatives of the bourgeoisie). In Germany, the monarchy was overthrown by another bourgeois revolution in 1918; in England and some other countries, it has remained in place to this day. What all these revolutions had in common, however, was that they were bourgeois in character: they were overthrows that disempowered the old ruling class, elevated the bourgeoisie to the status of the new ruling class and thus paved the way for the full implementation of capitalist society.

We have just talked about one example of revolutions: The bourgeois revolutions that historically put an end to feudalism and paved the way for capitalism. But the bourgeois revolutions are not the last type of revolution that history has produced. The bourgeoisie did indeed fight for social progress for a time in history, because it was in favor of abolishing the privileges of the estates and serfdom and greatly accelerated the progress of the productive forces through the capitalist mode of production. But today, capitalism has long since ceased to have anything progressive about it; on the contrary, as we shall see in more detail, it is a rotting, historically outdated mode of production. And capitalism has also produced the social forces that will overcome it: With industrial mass production, the working class (the proletariat) also came into the world. Early on, the working class began to organize itself and fight for better working and living conditions. In this historical context, a new view of history as the history of class struggles emerged—historical materialism, Marxism. With the emergence of industrial mass production, science became much more important in the economic process than ever before. A scientific perspective slowly became established in all areas of society, for example by beginning to better understand the organisms of animals and plants, and so on. Marx and Engels were therefore able to draw on the findings of the natural sciences and bourgeois philosophy to develop their dialectical materialist world view. At the same time, the working class emerged for the first time as a class which, due to its position in the system of production, possessed

the prerequisites to correctly recognize the laws of the prevailing mode of production and historical development in general. Unlike feudalism, which allowed multiple forms of rule to coexist and unite within itself, capitalism tends to unify society under the rule of capital. As we will see in the following chapter, the laws of development of capitalism are closely interrelated and result from each other. Therefore, it became possible to theoretically grasp the overall context of the historical development of capitalist society. The working class is emerging as a global class in a global system. The view of the working class is no longer as locally restricted as that of the rural peasantry, but is directed directly at capital as the dominant force in capitalist society and its main opponent in the class struggle. At the same time, it is free from any ownership of the means of production, which is why Marx and Engels wrote that it has "nothing to lose but its chains". Marx and Engels thus recognized that the working class is the only truly revolutionary class under capitalism and has the historical task of liberating itself by overthrowing the bourgeoisie.

Historical materialism is also capable of analyzing the historical developments that led to its own emergence. And its emergence then in turn became itself a historically effective force, as the theory that increasingly guided the working class in its struggle. As early as 1871, as a result of the Franco-Prussian War, the working class seized power for the first time in Paris: the Paris Commune, which Marx and Engels saw as the first example of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the state of the working class, lasted only 72 days before it was destroyed with brutal force by its enemies. But the next proletarian revolution in 1917 would successfully sweep away capitalist property and the associated ruling apparatus in Russia and establish a socialist society for the first time in history. We will look at the socialist revolution in more detail in Chapter 6.

Working question

- **What is meant by the terms means of production, productive forces, relations of production and mode of production? What do the terms exploitation and class struggle mean?**

Discussion questions

- **Can we speak of objective laws in history in a similar way to natural science, despite the active and conscious role of human beings?**
- **What is the difference between a Marxist and a bourgeois concept of progress? Discuss with reference to the following quote: "When a great social revolution shall have mastered the results of the bourgeois epoch, the market of the world and the modern powers of production, and subjected them to the common control of the most advanced peoples, then only will human progress cease to resemble that hideous, pagan idol, who would not drink the nectar**

but from the skulls of the slain." (Marx: The British Rule in India, MECW 12, p. 222).

- **The emergence of the working class was accompanied by a new phase of class struggle. Is it still correct to say, as Marx and Engels did at the time, that it has "nothing to lose but its chains"?**
- **Discuss the concept of revolution using a historical example.**

4 Critique of Political Economy

In this chapter, we look at the critique of political economy. What is meant by this somewhat unwieldy term?

At the time of Marx and Engels, political economy was the term used to describe the economic science of the day. Engels defined political economy as "s*cience of the conditions and forms under which the various human societies have produced and exchanged and on this basis have distributed their products*" (Engels: Anti-Dühring, MECW 25, 138).

The most important representatives of classical bourgeois political economy were the British economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo. It is no coincidence that the economists of the time spoke of political economy. At that time, they also understood economic theory as a political theory. Ricardo, for example, was also concerned with the question of classes in capitalist society—although for him, unlike Marx, there was of course always no question that the division of society into classes was a "natural", unalterable order. In contrast, the prevailing economic theory today, so-called neoclassicism, sees itself as "apolitical" and claims to be merely a neutral theory with the aim of economic efficiency. In reality, of course, every economic theory is political: economic theory can either reveal the laws of the capitalist mode of production or conceal them. If it really reveals the capitalist laws, it is a theory in the interests of the working class—because then it has to explain the emergence of profit through the exploitation of workers, about the necessity of crises, and about the fact that capitalism is digging its own grave. If it conceals capitalist laws by presenting "the market" as a neutral machine for the efficient distribution of resources, or claims that capitalist crises can be solved by state intervention, it is a theory in the interests of capital—a theory that prevents

knowledge and thus contributes to supporting the capitalist order.

Bourgeois economics can thus be roughly divided into two phases: on the one hand, the classical political economy of Ricardo, Smith, and a number of other bourgeois economists of the 18th and 19th centuries, who, despite their limitations, still proceeded scientifically and brought important insights to light. On the other hand, the vulgar economics of the later period contributed little to explaining the real laws of economics. It was essentially characterized by the denial and concealment of the exploitative character and crisis-prone nature of the capitalist mode of production, even at the expense of the theory's scientific validity.

At the time of the classical economists, the bourgeoisie was still a progressive class: it fought to overcome feudalism and absolutism, supported the natural sciences in their struggle against medieval superstition, and facilitated a huge upswing in the productive forces during the industrial revolutions. It is therefore not surprising that during this historical phase, bourgeois science was still genuinely interested in understanding the workings of society. However, even then this openness had clear limits: Smith and Ricardo recognized neither the character of surplus value as a product of exploitation, nor the necessity of crises, nor the inevitable development of capitalism towards increasing parasitism. When they talked about use value and exchange value, they described them largely correctly on a superficial level, but they did not understand that exchange value only exists in a society in which commodities are exchanged. What are in reality only manifestations of the capitalist mode of production were considered by these bourgeois economists to be general principles of economic life.

Marx therefore wrote his own theory as a *critique* of political economy. The word critique comes from the Greek and means the assessment of something after it has been analyzed. On the one hand, Marx's theory is a critique of the bourgeois economic theories of his time, which, despite their merits, ultimately failed to uncover the laws of development of capital. On the other hand, however, it is also a critique of social relations, which are revealed and made comprehensible for the first time by the theory. Unlike classical political economy, the critique of political economy does not simply examine superficial economic processes, but aims to penetrate the essence of things, to their underlying laws, and to explain them.

Of course, this does not mean that Marx abandoned the ground of political economy with his theory. After all, Marx's theory also deals with the conditions under which the production and exchange of social wealth takes place. Marx's theory can therefore also be counted as political economy. However, he also goes decisively beyond this by showing that classical political economy considered capitalism to be an eternally valid natural order and did not understand its historically temporary character.

The critique of political economy is one of the three basic components of Marxism-Leninism and is closely linked to the other two, the doctrine of class struggle and the struggle for socialism, as well as Marxist-Leninist philosophy. The cri-

tique of political economy is nothing other than the analysis of the laws of the capitalist mode of production with the tools of historical and dialectical materialism. By examining the conditions under which the class antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat arises, develops and intensifies, it is at the same time a precondition and component of the scientific doctrine of class struggle and socialist revolution. Scientific socialism is scientific and no longer utopian socialism precisely because it makes the lawful developments of capitalism, which make the transition to a socialist society possible, the basis of its analysis. This is why economic theory occupies a central position in Marx's oeuvre. „Capital" (MECW 35-37) is Marx's three-volume magnum opus, although his earlier works on political economy, in particular the „Grundrisse: A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" (MECW 28-29), are also relevant. In addition, there are the three volumes "Theories of Surplus Value" (MECW 30-34) and other writings. Short writings by Marx such as "Wages, Prices and Profit" and "Wage Labor and Capital" are suitable as an introduction to the critique of political economy.

Marx spent almost four decades of his life working on the subject. This alone shows that, in his view, economic theory was a fundamental pillar of his entire oeuvre. Communist politics without this foundation is simply not possible.

Working questions

- **What does the science of political economy investigate?**
- **What is the difference between classical political economy, vulgar economics and the critique of political economy?**

4.1 The method of the critique of political economy

Engels writes in the preface to the second volume of "Capital": "*Some — the classical bourgeois economists— investigated at most the proportion in which the product of labour was divided between the labourer and the owner of the means of production. Others — the socialists — found that this division was unjust and looked for Utopian means of abolishing this injustice. They all remained captives of the economic categories as they had found them.*" (Marx: Capital, Volume II, MECW 36, 20). Marx, on the other hand, uses his critical, dialectical method to analyze the laws of the capitalist mode of production: he is not only interested in how, for example, prices are formed and how wealth is distributed among the various classes, but asks about the developmental tendencies of capitalism and how it ultimately brings about its own downfall. Because the capitalist mode of production inevitably produces unbearable contradictions, because along with wealth it also produces the misery of the masses, crisis and destruction, because it is ultimately pregnant with its own downfall, the investigation of the laws of capitalism is tantamount to the critique of capitalism.

The aim of Marx's "Capital" is to "*lay bare the economic law of motion of modern*

society" (Marx: Capital, Volume I, MECW 35, 10). The term "law of motion" already implies that the focus is not on analyzing a constant state, but rather about understanding a society that develops according to certain laws. Marx therefore emphasizes "*the present society is no solid crystal, but an organism capable of change, and is constantly changing.*" (ibid., p. 11). It follows from this that the capitalist mode of production has different stages and levels of development. Naturally, Marx developed his theory based on his analysis of the capitalism of his time. As we shall see later, this phase of capitalism can be described as capitalism of free competition. Marx was therefore unable to examine the particularities of monopoly capitalism, which only emerged in the late 19th century and continues to dominate today. However, he already recognized the laws that had to lead to the formation of monopolies: the concentration and centralization of capital. Nevertheless, Marx was not simply analyzing a particular phase in the development of capitalism, but the fundamental laws of the capitalist mode of production as such, laws which will remain valid until capitalism is finally relegated to the dustbin of history.

Marx explains that the method of research is the reverse of the method of presentation: "*Of course the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development, to trace out their inner connection. Only after this work is done, can the actual movement be adequately described.*" (ibid., p. 19).

This means that the analysis of the capitalist mode of production must first take a concrete look at capitalism and the development of its various manifestations. Marx began his investigation by looking in detail, for example, at the English factory system, the movements of prices on the market, the emergence of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and the crises of his time. From this, he formed theoretical concepts—such as the concept of capital and the concept of profit. He then traced these back to more fundamental forms: capital arose from surplus value, surplus value from value, and so on. Finally, he came to the commodity and the contradiction between use value and value as the most fundamental form from which the capitalist mode of production develops. The following sub-chapters should make it easier to understand how this is meant. At this point it is sufficient to note that Marx's method of research progresses **from the concrete to the abstract**.

However, the presentation of the results of this research proceeds in the reverse direction: here, Marx starts from the fundamental basic structures of the capitalist mode of production and develops the increasingly complex forms from these until he finally arrives at concrete phenomena such as the movement of market prices and profit rates, the credit system, etc.

This expresses a fundamental approach: while research must initially start from existing material and analyze it, the presentation should enable an understanding of the fundamental laws operating beneath the visible surface. Like any object,

the capitalist mode of production can only be viewed as a unified whole. It is not possible, for example, to analyze only the credit system without also considering its origin in the exchange of goods, money, capital, etc. The unity of society is based precisely on this interconnectedness, and on the fact that all social relations are subject to the same fundamental laws. Thus, it is essential to begin with these fundamental laws in order to then show how they lead to the formation and development of concrete capitalist societies.

This also means that the analysis not only proceeds dialectically by showing how the concrete concepts develop from the abstract ones, but that it also incorporates the dialectical idea of development because it is the conceptual reflection of the *real* developmental context of the capitalist mode of production. Some bourgeois Marx specialists, such as Michael Heinrich, whose books are widely read, put forward the opposite thesis. Heinrich claims that Marx actually carried out a purely logical conceptual analysis. Marx would have analyzed the capitalist mode of production only "in its ideal average", but not in its historical development. According to Heinrich, Marx's critique of political economy is therefore a logical conceptual structure in which one concept follows from the other. However, this understanding is completely wrong and idealistic. For if Marx had simply formed abstract concepts in his theory, whose connections were purely logical in nature and did not depict real developments, then his theory would have been of little use in analyzing capitalism. He would have created a theoretical system that was purely a figment of the imagination, similar to the mathematical models of today's neoclassical economists, which have nothing to do with the real development of the economy. Marx and Engels were both of a decidedly different opinion on this question: the logical treatment of the concepts of capital, wrote Engels, was "*is indeed nothing but the historical method, only stripped of the historical form and of interfering contingencies. The point where this history begins must also be the starting point of the train of thought, and its further progress will be simply the reflection, in abstract and theoretically consistent form, of the course of history, a corrected reflection, but corrected in accordance with laws provided by the actual course of history*" (Engels: Karl Marx: A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, MECW 18, p. 475).

The most abstract, most general expression of capitalism, with which Marx begins the presentation of his theory, is the commodity. For Marx, the commodity is the nucleus of the capitalist mode of production, or its "elementary existence", as he puts it. Just as a full-grown plant with branches, leaves, and fruits can develop from a seed, the entire system of capitalist production and exchange develops from the commodity. The presentation of the laws of the capitalist mode of production therefore also begin with the commodity.

Marx's approach here contrasts sharply with that of today's mainstream economists, often taught in universities, who typically take the individual as the starting point of analysis and attribute certain behaviors to them (e.g., self-interest, utility maximization). This approach, however, is unscientific, as the prevailing

system—the mode of production—does not arise merely from the sum of individual actions. On the contrary, individual actions follow the laws of the prevailing mode of production, which exist and operate prior to and independently of the individual.

Working questions

- **What distinguishes Marx from today's bourgeois economists in terms of analyzing the mode of production?**
- **What is meant by the fact that Marx's method of research and presentation are reversed?**

4.2 Commodities and money

Commodity production has existed for longer than capitalism, even in pre-capitalist societies. The disintegration of the feudal order through the spread of commodity production created the basis for the emergence of the capitalist mode of production. Under feudalism, as the productive forces grew, the mass of goods that were not produced for immediate use but were traded on the market continued to increase. Social differences began to emerge among craftsmen and small traders: while some grew increasingly wealthy, others found it harder to make a living through their own work and eventually had to relinquish ownership of their means of production. Meanwhile, capitalist businesses employing wage laborers emerged: the so-called 'manufactories.' However, this new mode of production was at odds with the legal system still in place under feudalism: the nobility enjoyed privileges over the newly emerging class of rich merchants and factory owners, the guild system restricted competition between them, and serfdom prevented peasants from moving to the cities to become capitalist wage laborers. The old political system had become incompatible with the new economic basis of society. It had to be abolished so that capitalism could flourish, and indeed it was.

4.2.1 Value of the commodity

According to Marx, commodities have a dual character. On the one hand, they are objects with certain physical properties that make them useful for satisfying human needs. For example, an apple is suitable for eating because it contains vitamins and tastes good, while oil is suitable for heating because it stores a lot of energy in a small volume. Marx calls such useful things that can satisfy needs **use values**. In capitalist society, however, use values are rarely produced for personal consumption, nor are they intended to be freely distributed or given away.

Whereas in the past many families were still able to feed themselves from their farms and land, today almost everyone in industrialized countries is dependent

on buying all the resources they need. Use values thus take on the form of commodities, which gives them a second property: an exchange value. The exchange value of a commodity is the quantity ratio "*in which values in use of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort, a relation constantly changing with time and place.*" (Marx: Capital, Volume I, MECW 35, p. 46). Although this relation changes, it is more or less constant at a certain level over shorter periods of time and within a society with developed exchange relations. A farmer who imagines that they will be able to sell their grain for ten times as much tomorrow will soon realize that they will probably not be able to sell anything at such prices. The exchange ratios are therefore neither random nor dependent on the will of individuals. But how does the particular ratio at which goods of one kind are typically exchanged for goods of another kind (e.g. 3 kg of apples for 2 kg of cotton) actually come about? Obviously, no one simply sets these exchange ratios arbitrarily.

We often hear that the answer lies in the relationship between supply and demand. In reality, however, this does not explain very much. Because when supply and demand change, the ratios fluctuate slightly (for example, if there is a shortage of apples, you get more cotton for the same amount of apples), but what if supply and demand are exactly balanced? Why does 1kg of cotton, for example, cost as much as 1.5kg of apples? If you only use supply and demand as an explanation, there is no logical reason why you shouldn't also get 1000 kg of apples or 1000 kg of gold.

The explanation must therefore lie elsewhere. Despite their different physical properties, the exchanged goods must have a common characteristic that makes them comparable and therefore exchangeable (though strictly speaking, goods are only exchangeable because of their different physical properties, since exchanging apples for the same apples would be completely pointless). This common characteristic cannot consist of physical properties such as mass, volume, or color. For example, an emerald is not valuable because it is green, since grass is also green.

The common characteristic is its **value**. The value of commodities comes from the fact that they are products of labor produced for exchange. In contrast to use value, the value of goods can be measured as a quantity, namely by the **socially necessary labor time** required to produce the goods. A ship is much more expensive than a bottle of orange juice because it takes much more labor time to build a ship. What counts here is not the individual labor time, but the socially necessary labor time: a table is not worth more because the carpenter is particularly clumsy and takes twice as long as everyone else. After all, the prices are the same for one and the same type of goods, because nobody buys a table if they can get the same table from a neighboring dealer for half the price. Socially necessary labor time is the labor time required for the production of a certain type of good with average technology, average uninterrupted supply of raw materials, average skill of the worker, and so on. Value exists in societies in which private individuals produce independently of each other (i.e. not under a common central economic plan)

and exchange their products for each other on the market. Value is therefore ultimately nothing more than an ability to access wealth produced by other people through exchange.

Moreover, value is not the same as exchange value. Exchange value is only an expression of value. The fact that a commodity has a certain exchange value (e.g. 1kg of cotton corresponds to 1.5kg of apples) is precisely because it has a certain value (e.g. 1kg of cotton corresponds to 20 minutes of average socially necessary working time). The value of a commodity therefore always corresponds to the socially average necessary labor time, while the exchange value of a commodity is always determined in relation to another commodity.

There is a dialectical contradiction between the value and the use value of goods. On the one hand, value and use value are opposites. The use value describes the concrete, material properties of the commodity: as a use value, the commodity is, for example, a liter of oil with a certain calorific value, or a cow that produces milk. Value, on the other hand, looks away from these concrete properties and reduces all commodities to an abstract measure, the socially necessary labor time. If we look at the value of the commodity, it is irrelevant whether the commodity is oil or a cow or something completely different: the only thing that counts for the value is that it represents a certain amount of socially necessary labor time. Value is therefore exactly the opposite of use value. Similarly, in the exchange process value and use value are mutually exclusive opposites: when a commodity is sold, the seller renounces the realization of its use value in order to receive the value in monetary form. Conversely, the buyer is given the opportunity to consume the use value, but only after giving their trading partner the value of the commodity in monetary form. So each of them gives something in order to receive something else: value in exchange for use value. However, the two sides represent a unit in the commodity: value does not exist without use-value, because a commodity without use-value is of no use to anyone and will therefore not be bought by anyone, and thus cannot be exchanged on the market.

But how did Marx come to the conclusion that the socially necessary labor time contained in all commodities constituted their value?

Marx did not come to this realization alone. The great bourgeois economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo already advocated a so-called labor theory of value, i.e. they also assumed that the value of goods was determined by the average labor time required. In his book "The Wealth of Nations", Adam Smith also provides a vivid explanation for this: he chooses the example of a hunting tribe, one part of which specializes in hunting beavers, while another part hunts deer. If hunting a beaver costs on average twice as much working time as hunting a deer, according to the labor theory of value, one beaver must be worth as much as two deer. Hunters of both animals would have to follow this law on the market, whether they like it or not. For example, if some deer hunters were to exchange one deer for one beaver for some reason, then hunting beavers would no longer

be profitable and many beaver hunters would switch to hunting deer. This would create an oversupply of deer and their exchange ratio to beavers would fall again. Conversely, it would be just as impossible in the long term to demand three deers for one beaver, as this would turn the deer hunters into beaver hunters and the exchange rate would change again in favor of the deer. Of course, this extremely simplistic example only applies to today's reality to a limited extent: there are several factors that prevent the value from determining the exchange ratios so directly.

In reality, the free flow of labor and capital between branches of production encounters many obstacles. For example, a baker cannot suddenly start producing aluminum or machine tools just because the price of bread is falling. Smith's example assumes an economy of simple producers who have not invested large amounts of capital in their production. Nevertheless, it explains the basic mechanism at work in a capitalist market: namely, the law of value. Smith's example makes it clear that the law of value is the mechanism that distributes labor in capitalism between the various branches of production by regulating exchange relations; and that socially necessary labor time does not directly, but *ultimately*, determine exchange relations. The various factors that prevent the law of value from directly determining exchange values (that is, that goods are always exchanged in exactly the amount that corresponds to the socially necessary labor time embodied in them) must be explainable on the basis of the law of value. We will come to this later. However, the law underlying these factors must form the starting point of the analysis if one wants to go beyond merely describing surface phenomena.

Today's bourgeois economists have „forgotten" Smith and Ricardo's insight that human labor alone creates value. Instead, they simply talk about the fact that three so-called „factors of production" are involved in the production of value, namely capital and land in addition to labor. However, this view is already very old. Marx made fun of it: these alleged sources of wealth, he writes, "*belong to widely dissimilar spheres and are not at all analogous with one anoth- er. They have about the same relation to each other as lawyer's fees, red beets and music*." (Marx: Capital, Volume III, MECW 37, p. 801). The reason why only labor, and not capital and land, can actually create value is that labor is both the basis for people's life and survival and the basis on which all social relationships are based. Only through labor can natural things be turned into objects that are useful to people. In a commodity-producing society, people meet on the market to exchange the products of their labor. As we have already seen above, goods cannot be compared on the basis of their concrete use-value properties. Is the taste of an apple worth more or less than the strength of a brick? This question is completely nonsensical and cannot be answered. The only standard for comparing goods can be the average socially necessary labor time involved in them.

The law of value is therefore the basic mechanism for regulating exchange relations in all societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails. Commodity exchange also existed in pre-capitalist societies, so the law of value was

already effective in these societies within certain limits. However, it is only in the capitalist mode of production that it is really generalized, extended to a large part of social relations and becomes the predominant regulatory mechanism that controls the exchange of goods and the distribution of labor between the various branches of production.

The dual character of the commodity, its property of being both a use-value and a value, means that labor in a commodity-producing society also takes on such a dual character. It is no longer just **concrete labor**, i.e. labor that involves very specific work processes on a specific object in order to produce a specific, concrete use value. In principle, all labor has this character, no matter in which society. But when labor produces goods, it also has the character of "**abstract labor**." It is no longer the concrete activity that counts as abstract labor, but only the labor time itself, i.e. the average amount of socially necessary labor time that is performed. For it is only this abstract labor time, which disregards all concrete characteristics, that constitutes the value and counts at all in the exchange of goods on the market.

4.2.2 The value form

We have seen how value in exchange makes it possible to equate completely different goods: for example, 1 kg of cotton corresponds to 1.5 kg of apples. However, these goods can now be exchanged for other goods. For example, 1.5 kg of apples for 3 kg of wheat, 3 kg of wheat for 25 ballpoint pens, 25 ballpoint pens for a hat, etc.

This also means that each of these goods can be represented as the equivalent of one of the other goods. For example: 1.5 kg of apples, 3 kg of wheat, 25 pens, a cap, all of these commodities can be represented as the equivalent of 1 kg of cotton. In this case, Marx says that 1 kg of cotton is the **general equivalent form** of the other quantities of goods.

Historically, as soon as a specific commodity emerges that always plays the role of general equivalent in the exchange process, one can speak of the **money form**. Throughout history, various commodities have played the role of a money commodity, which was used as a medium of exchange to obtain other commodities. For example, certain shellfish, livestock or grain. Over time, however, metals became the standard monetary commodities, especially copper, silver and gold. Precious metals were particularly suitable for this purpose due to their material properties: They are non-perishable, transportable, easy to divide up and, due to the great effort involved in their production, they concentrate a comparatively high value in a small mass.

The money form is therefore as follows: 1 kg of cotton, 1.5 kg of apples, 3 kg of wheat, 25 ballpoint pens, a cap—all these goods are equivalent to 1 g of gold, for example, whereby gold is the generally accepted money commodity. Money is

therefore the general equivalent of goods, it is constantly exchanged for all goods.

4.2.3 The functions of money

Money has different functions in capitalism: it acts as a **medium of exchange** and as a measure of value, as in the example above. It can also act as a **store of value** if I want to save a certain amount of value for the future. It also functions as a **means of payment**: let's imagine a carpenter who needs a load of wood but doesn't have the money required in stock at the moment. He then issues the timber merchant with a promise of payment (a so-called bill of exchange) for the future in order to get the wood anyway. As soon as he has sold enough furniture, he pays off his debt. The money then acts as a means of payment. This possibility that the act of purchase and the act of payment do not coincide in an instant is significant for the emergence of the credit system and the amplification of crises, as we will see later. In capitalism, money also has the potential to function as capital, as we will see in the next chapter.

Bourgeois vulgar economists of the dominant "neoclassical" school present money as an invention made simply to facilitate the exchange of goods, as it plays no independent role in their market models. In "neoclassical" economics, money therefore only functions as a means of exchange and payment, as well as a unit of account for the exchange of goods. Marxism, on the other hand, assumes that money arises by law with the commodity economy, because the progress of the productive forces and the emergence of ever more comprehensive and complex exchange relations necessarily require a general measure of value and the possibility of storing value, issuing promissory bills, etc. Money is also the basis for the emergence of crises: it also functions as a store of value, which means that it can temporarily fall out of the economic cycle when it is saved. During these periods, when it is only used to store value and not to buy new goods, it does not create demand, which means that there may not be sufficient demand to buy the goods on offer. If there were no money, i.e. if the goods were simply exchanged directly for each other, such an imbalance, whereby enormous financial assets are created on the one hand, while huge quantities of unsold goods accumulate on the other, would not arise. This shows that money is not a neutral "lubricant" for the economy, but creates the possibility of overproduction crises.

It seems paradoxical that today's pro-capitalist vulgar economists pay little attention to money, since in modern capitalism large parts of the economy are specialized in the trading and lending of money. These branches of capital are not more or less random phenomena, but necessary stages and products of the development of capitalism in its current stage. But more on this later.

If every commodity is traded on the market for money, this means that its exchange value is expressed in the form of money. In other words, every commodity has a price. And since the exchange value is ultimately determined by the value of the commodity, prices are also governed by the law of value.

Marx assumed that money is tied to a specific commodity, which has its own value and is therefore able to play its role as a general commodity equivalent. Nowadays, however, we no longer go shopping with gold or silver coins, but with bills and coins that are virtually worthless in themselves. In Marx's time (and long before), paper money already existed, but this money represented a claim to gold that could be redeemed. Today's money is created through loans from banks, either in bank accounts (book money) or as cash. In principle, the monopoly on money creation lies with the central bank. Nowadays, however, this works in such a way that the central banks create money via the commercial banks: the central bank guarantees that the commercial banks always remain liquid, i.e. solvent. This means that the commercial banks can not only lend the amount they have previously received as customer deposits, but can also create credit far beyond this and thus throw money into the economic cycle.

Even if it has no intrinsic value, this money is accepted as money as long as the capitalist state can credibly guarantee that the exchange process will continue to take place, that is, that people can expect to be able to buy goods with their money in the future, even though the money actually has no value of its own.

Today, you can still buy gold with money, just like any other commodity, but there is no longer a fixed exchange rate. Some Marxist economists are of the opinion that, due to the special role of gold, for example as a store of value, gold is in fact still a money commodity. For reasons of space, however, this question cannot be discussed here.

4.2.4 Fetish character of the commodity

Another topic to which Marx devotes some attention will be discussed in this subchapter: the fetish character of the commodity.

As has been shown, commodities are not only use values, but also have a value. This means nothing other than that the commodity is no longer simply a relationship between people and objects of use—for example, the relationship that someone has with their home-grown tomatoes, which for them are simply useful objects that they can consume. Value, on the other hand, always expresses a social relationship: if we buy the tomatoes on the market for money, we enter into a social relationship with another person or a company, an exchange relationship between two private owners.

However, the movement of commodities, which now takes place billions of times in society, is not under any control, neither by society nor by a particularly powerful individual. The ratio at which one commodity can be exchanged for another, i.e. the prices of commodities, are not fixed under capitalism, but are determined by the law of value. Those who have to earn their living through wage labor and buy their food on the market are simply exposed to these movements without being able to determine them. This means that under capitalist conditions, people

cannot control social, economic, and technical developments. Conversely, they are forced to behave according to the laws of capitalism—or, as the bourgeois press often puts it, "the markets." People are thus dominated by the movement of inanimate objects, instead of making use of them in a planned way, as would be the case in a socialist society. Just as people in many ancient cultures created statues and images of gods, which they then worshiped as sacred and submitted to, in capitalism they are similarly forced to submit to its laws of movement: "As, in religion, man is governed by the products of his own brain, so in capitalistic production, he is gov- erned by the products of his own hand" (Marx: Capital, Volume I, MECW 35, p. 616). The fact that people are subjected to the rule of commodities means that the social relations in capitalism appear to them like natural laws and as relations between things themselves. It thus appears as if the relationships that individuals enter into with each other on the market are in reality simply relationships between the things themselves. It is therefore not immediately apparent that these are social relationships, i.e. relationships between people, which can also be abolished by people. The fact that the true nature of capitalism, its fundamental laws, cannot be seen through simple observation naturally contributes to its stabilization. Only the scientific approach of dialectical materialism reveals these laws, makes the fundamental functioning of society recognizable and thus also changeable.

Working questions

- **What are exchange value and use value? What is the difference between the value and exchange value of a commodity? How is value determined?**
- **What is money and how is it related to the exchange of goods?**
- **What is the fetish character of the commodity?**

Discussion question

- **Is Marx's thesis that value as socially necessary labor time ultimately determines prices plausible?**

4.3 Capital, surplus value and wage labor

We have seen that commodities are nothing more than use values produced for sale. The sale of a commodity brings the seller a certain amount of money. However, people do not normally strive for as much money as possible because they like to bathe in it. In a society in which the law of value has already been implemented, money is sought as a means of gaining general access to social wealth in all its forms. There is hardly anything that has been produced by people that cannot be bought with money. Selling goods for money is therefore only the first

step; the second step usually consists of using this money to buy other goods, which are then used to satisfy needs. For example: A shoemaker sells shoes. Then he goes to the weekly market with the money and buys food for himself and his family. This can be represented as a formula as follows:

Commodity-money-commodity, or C—M—C for short.This process is called simple commodity circulation.

But the following movement is also possible:

Money-Commodity-Money, or M—C—M.

In other words, buying a good in order to sell it again. Is this just the same thing seen from a different perspective? No, because the goal in the second formula is fundamentally different from the first. In the first case, the goal of the whole process is to obtain a good at the end that could satisfy needs. In the second case, however, there is no good at the end, but a sum of money. Does it make any sense to spend a sum of money only to end up, in the end, again with a sum of money? The answer is obvious: this only makes sense if the sum of money at the end of the exchange process is larger than that at the beginning. To express this difference, this difference in size, we represent the process in the following formula:

M—C—M'

The M' stands for the fact that the merchant receives a larger sum of money at the end than at the beginning. How can we imagine this process in reality? The first thing that probably comes to mind is the possibility of buying goods that can then be sold again at a higher price. If our cobbler changed his job and opened a shoe shop instead, he could buy shoes from the cobblers and sell them to his customers for a higher price, thus earning his living as a merchant.

4.3.1 Added value

In this case, however, no new value would have been created. The merchant buys items that already exist and does not change them before selling them. This also means that while it is possible for certain people to earn money by buying cheaply and selling expensively, it is impossible for society as a whole to become richer as a result. Because what one person earns in this way, another loses by having to pay a price premium. But companies are based precisely on making profits. If these profits only came from someone being cheated or defrauded when trading, the economy would just be a huge redistribution process until, after a short time, all the wealth ends up with a few merchants and everyone else has nothing left. A look at reality, however, shows that it must somehow be possible to create new value that companies can then appropriate as profit.

So where does profit come from in the process MCM'? There is only one way in which a profit can emerge from the exchange process M—C—M without unequal

exchange occurring: the money from the beginning must be used to buy a commodity that has the special use value of creating value. Let us remember that the origin of value, as we learned earlier, lies solely in human labor. A commodity that itself creates value can therefore only be one thing: **human labor**.

What does it mean that labor is a commodity? It means that there are people who offer their ability to work to other people in exchange for money. Or in other words: there are people who go to work for a wage.

Let's look at what happens now: The shoemaker we just talked about wants to expand his business and hire another worker. This worker now works 10 hours a day making shoes for his new boss. The material he works with is of course bought by the owner of the business. And the end products also belong to the owner. When he sells them, he also owns the proceeds. The worker, on the other hand, has only received his wages for his work. What determines how high this wage is?

We know that the worker works 10 hours a day. If we assume that the worker has average skill and level of education, this means that he produces a value of ten hours of socially necessary working time per day. Marx calls this **new value** created by the worker's work the new value. Expressed in money, this could be, for example, €10 per hour, or €100 per day.

The goods he produces are of course worth more than the new value of €100. This is because materials were used in production (e.g. leather) that already had a certain value (since they already contain labor time), which has now been transferred to the end product. But this is irrelevant at this point; it was only presented for the sake of completeness. We are interested in how the newly created value is now divided between the worker and the owner of the company.

The owner of the business cannot now pay his worker the entire new value of €100 that he has created. If the worker has created €100 of new value and his wage is also €100, the owner gets nothing, he makes no profit. He will therefore pay the worker a wage that is significantly lower than these €100. The business owner therefore does not pay the worker the value of his work product or the entire new value created. But what does he pay him then?

He does not pay for the goods produced, but for the worker's **labor**. He buys the worker's ability to work for a certain period of time (10 hours in our example). Because the labor and the raw materials are already the property of the business owner, the product of the labor is automatically his property too. How high is the value of labor, i.e. the wage? The worker must be able to continue working in the future and to do so he must be able to satisfy his most basic needs with his wages. In addition, there must also be workers in the future who are willing to sell their labor for a wage. Therefore the wage must also be sufficient to feed the worker's children and give them the education they need. The level of the wage is therefore determined by the **reproduction costs of labor**. We will come to what this means

exactly in a few paragraphs.

For example, let's assume that an hourly wage of €5 would serve this purpose. Then the worker would receive €50 a day for his work, even though his work has created a value of €100. The owner of the craft keeps the remaining €50 as profit. This difference between the newly created value and the value of the wage is called **surplus value**. At this point, it is enough to say that profit or entrepreneurial profit is nothing more than the expression of this surplus value in monetary form. The source of surplus value is exploitation. Remember: „exploitation" does not mean that a job is particularly inhumane while other jobs are more pleasant. Exploitation simply refers to the fact that the worker is paid less for his work than the value he has created.

The value of the entire product is now as follows:

Value of processed materials and raw materials + value of wages + surplus value.

4.3.2 Working day and wages

The worker's working day can also be divided into:

For part of the day the worker works for himself, creating the value of the wages he will later receive. For another part of the day he works for someone else and creates surplus value. Unlike in feudalism, where the serf was sometimes allowed to work on his own field for a certain number of days, but then had to perform forced labor on the lord's field for a few days a month, thus making exploitation clearly visible, in capitalism it is not immediately apparent. The worker sells his labor for the entire working day. So, superficially, it looks as if the worker is paid for the entire working day. In reality, however, he only works for himself for part of the working day, for the reproduction of his labor, while for another part of the day he works for the person who hired him. If the worker really only worked for himself all day, there would be no surplus value. In capitalism, therefore, exploitation is not immediately apparent; it must first be revealed through scientific analysis.

But in both cases, in capitalism as well as in feudalism, exploitation is only possible because the productive forces have advanced to such an extent that a person can produce more in one day than he needs to survive.

Doesn't all this contradict the assumption that commodities are exchanged at their values? Wasn't the worker cheated out of the full value of his wage? No, according to the laws of capitalism, he was not. Because wages actually correspond to the value of labor power. The value of a commodity is the socially necessary labor time required to produce it. The same is true of labor power: the value of labor power paid out as wages is what is necessary to reproduce labor power. Reproduction of labor power means, on the one hand, restoring the ability to work, i.e. feeding the worker and his family, his rest, medical care and what he needs to

continue to function as a worker; on the other hand, it also includes the costs of training the worker, i.e. school, vocational training, etc., insofar as the worker has to pay for these himself.

What exactly is included in the reproduction costs of labor varies depending on the country and historical era. While in the mid-19th century, a simple factory worker in Germany had to deal with little more than bare survival in a slum, today the reproduction of labor also includes rent for an apartment, the costs of electricity and heating, the petrol for the car that you drive to work, etc. In the mid-19th century, workers did not even have to be able to read and write to do their job, today many jobs require a long training course or even a university degree, as well as knowledge of computers or foreign languages, and much more. Marx says that the determination of the value of labor power, unlike other commodities, contains a "*historical and moral element*," because the needs of life of the worker "*are themselves the product of historical development, and depend therefore to a great extent on the degree of civilisation of a country, more particularly on the conditions under which, and consequently on the habits and degree of comfort in which, the class of free labourers has been formed*." (Marx: Capital, Volume I, MECW 35, p. 181).

In reality, we actually find many examples of how capital can push wages below the value of labor and then not even pay workers enough to survive. When there is an oversupply of labor, i.e. unemployment, there are many opportunities for the capitalist to do this. But even if workers manage to sell their labor at its value, wages are usually only based on the worker's ability to work, but are still far from enough to lead a good life and satisfy the worker's other needs. Wage labor is therefore by no means a happy situation for the worker, but on the contrary an expression of dependence on a wage that is not based on the needs of a decent life. The wage is also so low that it is a fairly reliable guarantee that the worker will never be anything other than a worker. Because it only covers the minimum subsistence level, it is not possible to save enough of it to eventually be „financially secure" or even to start your own business and then live off the work of others.

Before we return to surplus value and exploitation, it is worth considering one aspect in particular: the fact that labor is a commodity is anything but self-evident. For most of human history, it was not, or only in isolated cases. As long as the vast majority of humanity either practiced subsistence farming (i.e. agriculture, in which one produces the bare necessities of life for oneself and one's family) or (in feudalism) were serfs who by no means had the freedom to sell their labor, labor was not a commodity. Slavery was also something different: here the working person did not sell his labor as a commodity, but was himself a commodity that could be bought or sold. In order for labor to become a commodity, certain conditions must be met. Firstly, certain people must first see themselves as being compelled to sell their labor and allow themselves to be exploited. As long as they can live through their own work, for example as farmers or fishermen, they usually have no reason to accept wage labor where they only receive part of the

product of their labor as wages. The first prerequisite is therefore that there are enough people who do not own any means of subsistence (such as a small farm). They must not own anything other than their labor to earn their living.

Secondly, these people must also be able to sell their labor on the market, meaning they cannot be slaves or serfs forced to work for a master.

Marx therefore speaks of workers in capitalism as being „doubly free"—free from all means of subsistence and legally free to sell their labor to whomever they want. This type of „freedom" is actually an improvement over the direct oppression in feudalism and slave-owning society. However, it is not real freedom in the sense that a person can develop and shape his life according to his needs; in fact, it is a massive restriction of this freedom.

This precondition, that there is a class of people who are separated from all means of production, has not always been present historically. Before the emergence of capitalism, a large part of the population consisted of peasants who earned their living on a small or medium-sized piece of land. When feudalism was abolished by the emergence of the new capitalist mode of production, this also meant that many peasants were separated from their land, driving them to the cities and forcing them into wage labor. Marx called this process the **original accumulation** (or primitive accumulation) of capital. In England, for example, it took place through brutal state violence, with which the peasants were forced into the factory system under threat of mutilation or the death penalty. In the colonies in America, and later also in Africa and Asia, the expropriation of the indigenous population was accompanied by mass genocide. Marx writes that capital was born „*dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt*" (Marx: Capital, Volume I, MECW 35, p. 748). However, the process of primitive accumulation does not only take place during the historical transition from feudalism to capitalism, but also during the capitalist era, even up to the present day. Even today, in many parts of the world, small farmers are expropriated and driven from their land in order to make their land available to capitalist agricultural or mining monopolies, for example, or to force people to work as wage labor in the cities. Capitalism thus arose through brutal state violence against the masses, and its violent character has continued to increase to this day.

4.3.3 Capital

Surplus value is based on the fact that, in capitalism, there is a class of people who have no choice but to sell their labor. This labor is solely bought because the buyer believes they can make a profit from it. But what happens to this profit?

The business owner will use a portion of the profit to support themselves and their family. If they employ not just one but many workers and can appropriate a correspondingly large surplus value, they no longer need to work themselves; instead, they can live solely off the income generated by the exploitation of others'

labor.

The remainder of the profit is reinvested into production, such as purchasing new machinery and technology or expanding production, e.g. by building a new factory. This reinvested surplus value is thus transformed into **capital**. Capital is often confused with money in general, but this is incorrect: money is not capital in itself, nor is capital always in the form of money. The ability to transform into capital is just one of the functions of money under capitalism. Capital is self-valorising value—value that has been invested to create surplus value. This surplus value can then be reinvested to create additional surplus value. The owner of the capital, who invests it to appropriate the surplus value, is called a **capitalist**.

The simple cycle of capital looks like this:

Money is used to purchase goods, specifically labor and means of production. With these inputs, production begins, resulting in the creation of new value. Consequently, the goods produced have a higher value than the initial goods that entered the production process. Once the products are sold, the money that the capitalist receives is greater than the amount initially invested in production. Expressed as a formula:

M—C (working class, means of production)…Production…—C'—M'

Let's consider a company that has invested a working capital of €1 million in production. Of this total, €600,000 is allocated to raw materials, intermediate products, and the maintenance and purchase of new machinery and tools, while €400,000 is paid out to workers as wages. Marx calls the first sum **constant capital (abbreviated c)** because the raw materials and, due to their slow wear and tear, the machines only transfer their value to the goods and cannot create new value. They embody „dead" labor performed in the past. He calls the second sum, wages, **variable capital (abbreviated v)**—because this capital is invested directly in living labor, and actively contributes to the creation of new value.

During the production process, the value of the variable capital increases. Let's assume that the workers in the company only need half of the working day to produce the value of their wages. This means that during the other half of the working day, they create pure surplus value (abbreviated s). The new value created through their labor amounts to €400,000, which they receive as wages, and another €400,000 that the capitalist receives as surplus value.

The sum of the values of the goods created by the workers is then:

c worth €600,000 + v worth €400,000 + s worth €400,000 = €1.4 million

These €1.4 million now belong entirely to the capitalist. However, he cannot simply use them all for his own personal consumption. If he did, it would be the end of his company. In order to continue production, the capitalist must first replace the raw materials and machines he has used, i.e. his constant capital. €600,000 is

therefore deducted from the €1.4 million. But the workers must also continue to be paid so that the machines do not stand still. If their number and wage level remain the same, a further €400,000 is deducted. In this way, we can see that in order to maintain production at the same level, a constant amount of capital must be continually reinvested.

But the surplus value still remains. The capitalist can now deduct a certain amount from this surplus value for his personal luxury consumption, let's say €100,000. The capitalist reinvests the remaining €300,000 in his company, for example by buying additional machines and employing the workers to operate them. If the ratio between constant and variable capital remains the same, the constant capital would increase by €180,000 to a total of €780,000 and the variable capital by €120,000 to €520,000. Since more workers are now involved in production, the surplus value would also increase to €520,000.

The value of the goods produced in the second round is then:

780,000 € (c) + 520,000 € (v) + 520,000 € (s) = 1.82 million €

So we see: the capitalist's business has grown significantly. He will of course invest most of this new surplus value again. This movement can be repeated as often as he likes, and capital can therefore in principle grow without limit. This is called **accumulation** or **valorization** of capital. This example also shows us the extent to which the workers are exploited. We have assumed here that the workers work half the working day for themselves and the other half for the capitalist, so that variable capital and surplus value are equal. In reality, of course, things can be different. The exploitation rate or surplus value rate describes exactly this ratio: the surplus value divided by the variable capital, m/v. In this case, the result would be 1 (or 100%).

Because surplus value is the source from which capitalists finance both their own consumption and the expansion of their businesses, they constantly strive to increase the proportion of surplus value in their capital. There are basically two ways to do this.

First, they can extend working hours by extending the working day or making workers work on weekends. The proportion of **surplus labor** (the part of the working day during which the worker produces surplus value for the capitalist) can be increased compared to the proportion of **necessary labor** (the part of the working day during which the worker produces the value of his wage) by extending working hours in absolute terms. This means that workers work longer for the same wage, and thus their hourly wage has been reduced. It is also possible to reduce wages alone without extending working hours. If wages only cover the minimum subsistence level, workers are pushed below this limit. This is generally only possible when there is a surplus of labor, so that workers have to accept any wage labor, even if it is not enough to survive. This form of capital appropriating surplus value is therefore called the production of **absolute surplus value**.

Obviously, however, the extension of the working day is not unlimited: there are 24 hours in a day and 7 days in a week. In addition, workers need time to sleep, rest and eat if they are to survive. Therefore, the working week is always less than 7 x 24 hours. In addition, workers can organize themselves and fight against excessively inhumane working hours, which can push the maximum limit for the working day even lower.

Nevertheless, capitalists naturally want to continue to increase their surplus value, and competition among themselves encourages them to do so. The second way of increasing surplus value is to do so while working hours remain the same. If the length of the working day remains the same, the part of the working day in which surplus value is produced can only increase if the part in which necessary work takes place becomes smaller. This part in which workers produce the value of their wages can decrease only if the value of labor power falls—that is, if the restoration of labor power becomes cheaper. The value of labor power falls when the consumer goods that workers buy with their wages in order to maintain their ability to work and live lose value. And these goods lose value when the average socially necessary working time for their production falls. So if a new production method is introduced that organizes the production of food, clothing, housing, etc. more efficiently and in a shorter time for society as a whole, its value falls, and with it the value of labor power. The progress of the productive forces makes it possible to pay workers a lower wage without pushing them below the minimum subsistence level. Capitalists are naturally happy to take advantage of this opportunity, because this immediately increases the proportion of surplus value in their invested capital. Because this increases surplus value without lengthening the working day, this is referred to as the production of **relative surplus value**.

With the emergence and development of capitalism, most labor processes that were previously carried out under independent management are increasingly absorbed by capital and placed under the command of a capitalist. Often, however, the labor process itself initially changes little or not at all. In this case, Marx speaks of a merely **formal subsumption** of labor under capital. In other cases, however, the subordination of labor under capital also changes the labor process itself in order to best meet the profit goal and the accumulation of capital. The workers therefore produce in a more disciplined, regular manner, with better division of labor, etc., so that the capitalists can squeeze more surplus value out of them. Marx calls this the **real subsumption** under capital, since work is not only subordinated in form, but there is also actual intervention in the labor process. The real subsumption under capital is primarily associated with the production of relative surplus value, because, unlike with absolute surplus value production, productivity increases occur.

Let us now return to the concept of relative surplus value: increases in productivity in the consumer goods industry have the pleasant effect for capital that they allow surplus value to be increased without having to force workers to work more or consume less, which in many cases would provoke bitter resistance from the

workers.

So are new machines only worthwhile for capitalists if they improve the production of *consumer goods*? That obviously cannot be the case, because capitalism has also enabled enormous progress in the arms industry or in the production of means of production (machines, technology, etc.). Let's take a closer look at what happens when a capitalist buys a new machine to improve production.

With a new machine a capitalist can now produce, for example, combine harvesters of the same (or even better) quality in less time than before. As long as the capitalist in question is the only one with the new machine, they can also produce in less time than everyone else. The *average socially necessary working time*, i.e. the value of the combine harvesters, is then still high, while in their company the individually necessary working time has fallen! The capitalist can now either sell their products at the same price as before and then make an extra profit, because the production time and therefore the workers' wages for an individual combine harvester have fallen. Or they can sell their products significantly cheaper than the competition, namely at the price resulting from their lower production costs plus the average profit. In this case they no longer makes an extra profit, but they harm the competition. Because of course their cheaper product now has an advantage on the market and is more likely to be bought than those of the competition. By being able to increase their sales figures, the capitalist can still increase the absolute amount of profit that flows to them. In addition, they displace their competitors, which in the long run can be a greater advantage than the short-term extra profit they lose due to the low sales prices. However, the capitalist only has this advantage until the new technology is generally used and their lead has disappeared.

Capitalism is an economy in which there are always many capitalists competing against each other. The hunt for extra profits and the desire to drive out competitors forces capitalists to constantly search for more efficient production methods and more modern technologies that make it possible to produce goods in a shorter time. The individual capitalist cannot escape this, otherwise they will quickly find themself in a situation in which their competitors are more productive than they are and can offer their goods for sale at a correspondingly cheaper price.

This constant drive of capitalists to increase labor productivity is the reason why capitalism has promoted the development of productive forces to a much greater extent than all previous modes of production. That is the whole secret behind the incredible productivity advances that have taken place since the Industrial Revolution. At the same time, however, we can already see here how capitalism hinders technological progress compared to socialism, the next higher mode of production: The individual capitalist wants to keep the new technology for themself and will prevent their competitors from using it for as long as possible, to retain their productivity advantage. The longer the economy as a whole remains backward, the better for the capitalist. This is why patent law exists, which prevents the gen-

eral use of the best technologies by the whole of society.

Since profit is the driving force behind capitalist accumulation, the hiring and firing of workers also depends on the prospects for profit at any given time. Capital is constantly throwing some workers out of the production process because it cannot find profitable employment for them. Marx calls the mass of workers who are forced into unemployment, i.e. without pay and bread, the **industrial reserve army**, because they represent a reserve for the capitalists that they can re-employ in an upswing and use in the meantime to suppress wages. According to Marx, the more developed the capitalist mode of production, the larger the industrial reserve army becomes in relation to the workers who do wage labor. And this larger industrial reserve army, this permanent proportion of unemployed in society, is also associated with increasing poverty and misery. Marx calls this "*the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation*" (Marx: Capital, Volume I, MECW 35, p. 638). This law is expressed in the impoverishment of the working class.

Working questions

- **How is surplus value created? What conditions are necessary for the production of surplus value?**
- **What is the difference between surplus value and capital? How does the accumulation of capital work?**
- **What is constant and variable capital and why are they called that?**
- **What is the effect of capitalists' pursuit of extra profits?**

Discussion questions

- **In today's capitalism, is the importance of relative or absolute surplus value more decisive?**
- **If we look at the development of capitalism, can we speak of a relative impoverishment of the working class? Is there also an absolute impoverishment of the working class?**

Relative or absolute impoverishment of the working class?

There have been repeated discussions in the labor movement about whether the impoverishment of the working class, which Marx believes is inevitable as a result of capitalism, should be understood as absolute or relative.

Relative impoverishment means that the working class's share of the wealth of society is constantly decreasing, meaning that more and more wealth is concentrated in the hands of the ruling class.

Marx wrote: „*The law, finally, that always equilibrates the relative surplus population, or industrial reserve army, to the extent and energy of accumulation, this law rivets the labourer to capital more firmly than the wedges of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock. It establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i. e., on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital*," i.e. in the working class. And: „*the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to its torment of labour. The more extensive, finally, the Lazarus-layers of the working class, and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism.*" (Marx: Capital, Volume I, MECW 35, p. 639-640.)

Lenin stressed that this was an absolute impoverishment, as the living standards of the working class continued to fall: „*The worker is becoming impoverished absolutely, i.e., he is actually becoming poorer than before; he is compelled to live worse, to eat worse, to suffer hunger more, and to live in basements and attics*" (Lenin: The Impoverishment of Capitalist Society, LCW 18, p. 435-436).

In contrast, it is often pointed out today that, although the development of capitalism has led to a relative impoverishment due to the increase in the rate of surplus value, there has not been an absolute decline in living standards. There are various tendencies towards absolute impoverishment (e.g. an increase in the intensity of work, work-related illnesses, a tendency towards more severe crises and wars, etc.), but there are also counter-tendencies. The progress of the productive forces would also lead to certain improvements in the standard of living of the working class in the long term, although not proportional to the increase in social wealth. This not only calls into question the theory of general absolute impoverishment, but also the opposing position of the revisionist Eduard Bernstein, who assumed that there could be a steady increase in the standard of living of

the working class under capitalism. It is also often questioned whether the relevant statements by Marx (see above) should be interpreted as a general law of absolute impoverishment. However, we cannot present or clarify the discussion about whether capitalism inevitably leads to absolute impoverishment at this point.

4.4 The circulation process of capital

The previous sub-chapters on the critique of political economy have dealt with the concepts of commodity and value, and then, above all, with how capital is produced. This was the content of the first volume of Capital (MECW 35). The second volume (MECW 36), on the other hand, deals with the circulation of capital.

If a capitalist consumes the entire surplus value themself, we speak of **simple reproduction**, because apart from the replacement of the capital spent, no productive investment has been made. However, as we have seen, because of competition the capitalist's goal is not simple reproduction, but the **expanded reproduction** of their capital. Expanded reproduction means that part of the surplus value is reinvested by the capitalist, i.e. accumulated.

The essence of commodities is that they are not simply products that can satisfy any needs, but that they are produced for sale. They therefore enter the market and are traded there. This process is known as the circulation process of goods, which must be distinguished from their production process. The circulation process includes all the processes that contribute to the realization of the value of the goods, but are not absolutely necessary for the production and provision of the goods. Just like the production process, the circulation process causes costs for the capitalist, which are summarized as circulation costs. Circulation costs include buying and selling time, storage costs, and part of the transportation costs. Although it incurs costs, the circulation process does not produce the commodity and therefore cannot add value to it—value is created exclusively in the sphere of production.

Before a productive investment yields a profit in the form of money, at least one commodity must have been produced and sold. During the period before this, the capitalist has only spent money without earning any. If they have taken out a loan for their investment, they may now also have to pay interest. In any case, the capitalist has an interest in turning over the capital they have invested as quickly as possible, holding the realized surplus value in their hands as quickly as possible, and being able to reinvest it as quickly as possible in order to improve his competitive position. The time during which the capital is in circulation (in cir-

culation/realization) is not used for the production of surplus value. The capitalist therefore strives to shorten the circulation time of capital. And this in turn is an important means of also shortening the turnover time of capital—that is the time it takes for capital to go through the cycle C—M—C' once and realize the surplus value on the invested capital.

4.4.1 The turnover time of capital—fixed and circulating capital

The turnover time of a particular capital depends on its physical nature and its role in the production process. For example, raw materials such as iron ore are consumed in the production process and are incorporated into the product (e.g. as steel girders for a bridge). Once the work period (the time to produce a good of a certain type) is complete, the raw material consumed must be replaced so that the work process can be repeated. At this point, the product is finished and can be sold. Even auxiliary materials such as heating oil give up their value completely to the product during a work process. The same applies to expended labor, whose full value plus the surplus value is always transferred to the product. Marx calls this type of capital, which circulates and is fully utilized in each completed period of work, liquid or **circulating capital**.

Other investments are longer-term and only part of the capital is consumed during a given working period. Machines can normally produce a great many goods until their physical wear and tear is so advanced that they have to be replaced. They only give up their value to the product to the extent that they wear out on average through the production of the individual goods. For example: a machine that is worth €10,000 and can be used to produce 100,000 light bulbs gives up 10 cents of its value on each bulb. However, there is more than physical wear and tear. In capitalism, where technology is constantly advancing, machines are often replaced long before they actually stop working. As soon as a more advanced model hits the market, the older machine becomes outdated. This means that a machine loses its value not only through physical wear and the „ravages of time," but also because it becomes obsolete relative to the latest technological developments. Marx calls this type of wear and tear (or rather, loss of value) "moral wear and tear". Because this second type of capital, laid out in machines and buildings, remains almost unchanged during a labor process, Marx calls it **fixed capital**. "*In the time during which the fixed capital turns over once, the circulating capital turns over several times*" (Marx: Capital, Volume II, MECW 36, p. 170).

The distinction between fixed and circulating capital should not be confused with that between constant and variable capital. The difference between constant and variable capital lies in the production process, namely in whether the capital is invested in living, value-creating labor or in objectified, past, "dead" labor, which only transfers its value to the product. In contrast, the difference between fixed and circulating capital arises from the sphere of circulation, depending on how

long it takes for different parts of the invested capital to be completely turned over. Unlike the concepts of constant and variable capital, the terms fixed and circulating capital were not coined by Marx, but by Adam Smith. Fixed capital is a part of constant capital, while circulating capital comprises both variable capital and a part of constant capital (e.g. raw materials).

Even if the circulation process itself is not value-creating, capitalists can specialize in operations of the circulation sphere and build a capitalist enterprise on it. Examples of this are supermarkets, merchant shipping, but also advertising and marketing agencies, all of which serve the purpose of getting goods to their buyers more quickly and in a more targeted manner. The capitalists who offer these services thus shorten the circulation time and turnover time of the capital active in industry, i.e. they support the industrial capitalist in obtaining their surplus value faster and being able to reinvest it more quickly. In this way, they increase the mass of surplus value that each individual capitalist can produce and that is produced by society as a whole. However, they do not do this out of solidarity with their class brothers, but are so well compensated that it is possible to specialize entire companies in certain aspects of the circulation process. The same applies to interest-bearing capital, which we will come to later.

4.4.2 The reproduction schemes

When a commodity is sold on the market, the demand for it must originate from somewhere. If a society produces more goods than there is money to buy them, overproduction occurs—we will look at this possibility in more detail later. However, it is not enough for there to be money somewhere in society; it must be actively used to buy these goods. Let's imagine, for example, that 10 million extra coffee machines were produced because the workers' wages are too low to afford purchasing them. Couldn't the capitalists then buy the surplus coffee machines from their profits? Technically they could, but they wouldn't if they have no use for them. Because the capitalists are few in number and even if each of them owns five villas, they can only accommodate and make good use of a limited number of coffee machines.

Conversely, if an excess of machine tools is produced, simply raising workers' wages won't resolve the issue. They may choose to spend their increased earnings on cars, televisions, or condominiums, rather than on industrial machines.

We can thus see that the amount and type of commodities produced, along with the distribution of total social income among different classes, are crucial factors in determining whether capital accumulation is reasonably balanced or whether it is heading for a crisis.

Marx created a highly simplified model for this, in which production consists of two departments and society of two classes. Department I comprises the capital that produces the means of production. Department II comprises the capi-

tal that produces means of consumption (consumer goods). Only capitalists buy the goods in Department I. The buyers of Department II are mainly the workers (because there are many more of them) and, to a lesser extent, the capitalists. If we now know how much value is produced in both departments, how many consumer goods the capitalists consume and the ratio according to which the invested capital is divided into constant and variable capital, then we can determine whether the means of production and consumer goods produced are actually purchased or not. The following numerical example is intended to provide a clearer picture of how imbalances in the reproduction of capital can arise. However, if you find it too complex, feel free to skip over it.

Example: Department I has a volume of €1 billion. Of this, €700 million is constant capital, €200 million is variable capital and €100 million is surplus value.

This can be represented in the following equation (times a factor of 1,000,000):

Total (I) = c (I) + v (I) + s (I) = 700 + 200 + 100 = 1000

Department II has a volume of €2 billion. Of this, € 600 million is constant capital, €1.2 million is variable capital and €200 million is surplus value:

Total (II) = c (II) + v (II) + s (II) = 600 + 1200 + 200 = 2000

If v (I) and v (II) are added together, €1.4 billion is paid out as wages. If s (I) and s (II) are added together, this results in a surplus value of €300 million. If c (I) and c (II) are added together, the result is a constant capital of €1.3 billion. Assuming that the capitalists consume €50 million of the €300 million surplus value personally and reinvest €250 million in production, the surplus value could then be divided up as follows:

s (I) = s (I, consumption) + s (I, investment)

s (II) = s (II, consumption) + s (II, investment)

The social demand N, which is necessary to sell the products of both Departments in full, is €2 billion for Department II and €1 billion for Department I:

N (I) = Total (I)

and

N (II) = Total (II).

The demand for both Departments is now calculated as follows:

N (I) = c (I) + c (II) + s (I, investment) + s (II, investment)

N (II) = v (I) + v (II) + s (I, consumption) + s (II, consumption)

The state of equilibrium is reached when:

N (I) = Total (I), i.e. c (I) + v (I) + s (I) = c (I) + c (II) + s (I, investment) + s (II, investment)

N (II) = Total (II), i.e. c (II) + v (II) + s (II) = v (I) + v (II) + s (I, consumption) + s (II, consumption)

In our case, N (I) has a value of €1.55 billion and N (II) €1.45 billion. This means that there is no equilibrium: in Department I, demand is €550 million higher than supply. This is not a problem at first, on the contrary: as long as there is demand for means of production, the capitalists in Department I will simply expand their production until demand can be satisfied by their corresponding supply. The situation is different in Department II. There, demand is €550 million lower than supply. We are therefore dealing with overproduction in the consumer goods sector. We will look at the consequences of such an imbalance in the subchapter about crises.

The model highlights a fundamental problem within capitalism. Due to the absence of a central authority to determine what should be produced or not—and because on the contrary there exists an anarchy of production where each capitalist only makes investment decisions solely according to their individual company's needs—there is no guarantee that the goods produced will find buyers. In contrast, the neoclassical doctrine prevalent in today's universities asserts precisely the opposite: it believes that every supply automatically creates its own demand and that the market therefore does not lead to overproduction (a notion known as Say's Law). We have now identified one reason why this assumption is flawed.

The model presented above is called a reproduction scheme because it is a schematic representation of how the reproduction (i.e. re-creation) of the distribution of income and investment occurs in a capitalist economy. The reproduction schemes thus serve as a formula that, on one hand, illustrates how imbalances can arise, while on the other hand, also demonstrates how, despite the anarchy of production, temporary growth phases or states of equilibrium repeatedly emerge.

Working questions

- **What is the turnover time of capital?**
- **What are fixed and circulating capital? What is the difference between constant and variable capital?**
- **How can imbalances arise between the different departments of production?**

4.5 The profit rate

So far, we have understood profit simply as a monetary expression of surplus value—just as we had assumed the price of goods to be a monetary expression of value. However, this was only a simplifying assumption, which was necessary for understanding at this point, and not a statement about reality.

First of all, the profit of the industrial capitalist is only one part of the monetary expression of surplus value. Another part is the interest that the industrial capitalist pays to the bank. We will come to this in the next sub-chapter. Another part is the basic rent, which will be discussed briefly in subchapter 4.10. And, of course, part of the surplus value is also paid to the state as taxes. At this point, it suffices to say that although productive capital has the surplus value produced by its workers, it can only really appropriate part of it. However, as we will see in a moment, there is another reason why the profit of the individual capitalist does not correspond to the surplus value. For this we must first look at the rate of profit.

4.5.1 What is the rate of profit?

For the capitalist, the absolute amount of profit is not decisive. For a small capitalist, a profit of €10 million can be a lot. For a large corporation, on the other hand, it is negligible and a major problem. The decisive factor is therefore the ratio of profit to invested capital. Or if we express it in terms of value: Added value divided by constant plus variable capital.

$s / (c + v)$

Marx and the classical economists before him (Smith, Ricardo) call this ratio the **rate of profit**. The rate of profit plays an extremely important role in the accumulation of capital. This is because it determines whether the capitalist is able to make new investments at all, i.e. whether there is economic growth and whether workers are hired or fired. The fluctuations and long-term development of the profit rate are therefore decisive for the overall development of capitalism. And we will now look at the overall process of capitalist accumulation, i.e. the unity of the production and circulation process, which is the subject of Volume III of "Capital".

We have already seen earlier that the rate of profit depends primarily on two factors: firstly, the rate of surplus value, i.e. the proportion of surplus value in the newly created value. And secondly, on the ratio between constant and variable capital. Because only variable capital creates value, a decreasing share of variable capital also means less surplus value and therefore, if the total invested capital remains the same, a decreasing profit rate. This second variable, the ratio between c and v, depends on the technical composition of the capital. A company that produces textiles, for example, only needs a relatively small amount of constant capital and a large number of workers. A merchant shipping company, on the oth-

er hand, must own many ships, which are very expensive. In this case, constant capital is high and variable capital is relatively low. Marx calls this ratio, which is determined by the technical structure of the industry, the **organic composition of capital**.

Let's look at this again using a numerical example:

In industry A, a constant capital of €600,000 and a variable capital of €400,000 is invested and the surplus value rate is 100% (i.e. the workers produce only the surplus value for half of the day). The surplus value then also amounts to € 400,000.

In industry B, a higher use of machines is necessary and, in comparison, less capital is spent on labor. The constant capital is €1 million and the variable capital is €300,000. Because the value added rate is also 100%, the value added is € 300,000.

A: € 600,000 (c) + € 400,000 (v) + € 400,000 (s) = € 1.4 million

The profit rate here is therefore 40% with an invested capital of € 1 million.

B: € 1 million (c) + € 300,000 (v) + € 300,000 (s) = € 1.6 million

Here, the profit rate with invested capital of € 1.3 million is approximately 23%.

4.5.2 The equalization of profit rates

The two branches of production therefore produce different amounts of surplus value and have different profit rates. If we assume that capital and labor are reasonably mobile, however, this situation will not remain so. This is because there is no reason for the capitalists in branch B to accept a lower rate of profit than the other capitalists in the long term. They will therefore withdraw their capital and invest in the more profitable sector A. As a result, the supply of goods increases in industry A, while it decreases in industry B. This naturally has an effect on the prices of goods in the two industries, which will now tend to move towards each other until the point where the rate of profit is the same in both industries. The profit rates of the different industries converge towards the average profit rate of the economy as a whole. In this way, it is possible for companies that produce much more surplus value than others to still realize the same profit in the end.

However, this means that the prices of goods cannot be directly determined by the socially necessary labor time. This is because the equalization of the average profit rate is based precisely on the fact that prices deviate greatly from the values of the respective products due to the outflow and inflow of capital from the various sectors. In other words, the idea that prices fluctuate around the value of goods, as we had previously assumed, is wrong on closer inspection. The equalization of profit rates creates another variable around which market prices move: the **price of production**. The actual traded market price is sometimes higher and sometimes lower than the production price, depending on short-term fluctua-

tions in supply and demand. Ultimately, however, production prices are the center around which market prices fluctuate.

Doesn't that mean that the labor theory of value has been refuted? If the socially necessary labor time does not determine commodity prices at all, why is the concept of value still needed? Well, the statement of the law of value is only that prices are ultimately regulated by values. And they are, because if the socially necessary labor time for the production of a commodity decreases or increases, then the price also decreases or increases. Since the production prices are created by a redistribution of value (and not by newly created value), the sum of the prices is still equal to the sum of the values in terms of society as a whole. The sum of profits is also equal to the sum of surplus value. It should also be clear why the concept of value is indispensable for understanding the capitalist mode of production: value is what makes it possible to understand why goods are exchanged for one another in a certain ratio. And on the basis of Marx's labor theory of value, it is possible to explain where profit comes from.

4.5.3 The tendency of the rate of profit to fall

The realization that the rate of profit is determined by the organic composition of capital has another very important consequence. This is because the organic composition not only varies between different industries and companies, but also changes over time for an individual company. Let's take capital from industry A as an example again. Its composition was:

€ 600,000 (c) + € 400,000 (v) + € 400,000 (s) = € 1.4 million

However, an invention now increases its organic composition. A new machine replaces many workers, so that c is now € 700,000, but v is only € 200,000. The capitalist therefore has fewer expenses overall, namely only € 900,000 instead of € 1 million. But what happens to the surplus value? If the rate of surplus value remains the same, i.e. the surplus value is just as large as the variable capital, the surplus value is now only € 200,000. The profit rate is then € 200,000 divided by € 900,000, i.e. 22.2%.

But how is that possible? The capitalist has introduced the new machine precisely in order to be more productive and make an extra profit. That's right, and initially his individual profit rate will therefore also rise. After all, his goods become cheaper, allowing him to make an extra profit. The extra profit means that value that was produced elsewhere now flows to the capitalist with the more advanced production technology.

But what happens in society as a whole when the organic composition of capital increases? In the course of the development of capitalism, this is inevitably the case, because the progress of the productive forces is always accompanied in the long term by the fact that certain work steps are taken over by machines, thereby

saving human labor. The amount of investment required in ever more complex machines and technologies that can process ever larger quantities of material therefore inevitably increases, while the number of workers and the wages they receive do not increase to the same extent.

If living labor becomes less and less in relation to "dead" labor, this means nothing other than that a given mass of invested capital produces less and less surplus value. Or to put it another way: as the organic composition of capital increases, the rate of profit falls in society as a whole.

Marx wrote about the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall: "*In every respect, this is the most important law of modern political economy, and the most essential one for comprehending the most complex relationships*" (Marx: Grundrisse, MECW 29, p. 133). However, this is only a law of tendency, since the rate of profit does not always and everywhere fall. There are phases with a rising rate of profit and there are factors that counteract the fall in the rate of profit. Marx lists some of these factors: The increase in the rate of exploitation of labor, the pushing down of labor wages below their value, the cheapening of the components of constant capital (in that, for example, older machines lose value through technical progress), relative overpopulation, foreign trade, and the increase in share capital. This is not the place to examine these factors in detail. In any case, Marx shows why, although they all slow down and temporarily reverse the fall in the rate of profit, they cannot stop it in the long term.

The tendency of the rate of profit to fall shows the historical finiteness of capitalism. As has already been shown, the rate of profit is the determining factor for the accumulation of capital, on which the development of capitalism depends. As the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is an inevitable long-term law of capitalism, the accumulation of capital also slows down over time and periods of crisis with low or even negative rates of profit tend to deepen.

Many studies from various countries show that the rate of profit has actually fallen in most developed capitalist countries over many decades. This provides further empirical evidence for the correctness of Marx's thesis of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and, indirectly, for the correctness of the labor theory of value on which this thesis is based.

Working questions

- **What is the rate of profit and why does it equalize with the average rate of profit?**
- **What does this mean for the prices of goods?**
- **Why does the rate of profit tend to fall?**

Discussion questions

- **Although commodity prices do not equal commodity values, the text argues that the labor theory of value is still valid. Is this plausible?**
- **What are the effects of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall on society?**

4.6 Credit and fictitious capital

In capitalism, in addition to its other functions, money also has the special utility value of functioning as capital: anyone who owns a sum of money can invest it in such a way that it yields a profit. Money, invested as capital, therefore creates more money. Like other use values, this use value can also be traded on the market. If money is lent, this use value, which functions as capital, is sold for a certain period of time. The capital itself is traded like a commodity, it is bought and sold. The price for this is a portion of the surplus value produced, which the debtor (who took out the loan) pays to the creditor (who granted the loan). This price of money capital is called interest.

4.6.1 Credit

The **credit system** necessarily develops with the development of capitalism. If capitalists could only produce and accumulate with their own capital, their ability to accumulate would be very limited. They would always have to wait with their investments until they had accumulated enough income to be able to cover the necessary expenditure out of their own pockets. The credit system overcomes this barrier to capital accumulation. The capitalist can now go to the bank and take out a loan, which increases his ability to accumulate capital. For example, if a capitalist has equity capital of €1 million, they would produce a surplus value of €100,000 at an average profit rate of 10%. However, if they now take out a loan of €1 million from the bank, the capital that he can invest doubles. They now invest € 2 million and accordingly realize a surplus value of € 200,000. Of course, the bank did not grant the industrialist the loan out of kindness, but because it receives interest in return. Let's assume that the interest rate is 5%. The industrial capitalist would then have to pay €50,000 in interest to the bank. However, with an initial capital of €1 million, they would still have a profit of €150,000 left over, or a profit rate of 15%. As long as the interest rate is lower than the rate of profit, which is usually the case, it is worthwhile for productive capitalists to take out loans, expand their production and increase their rate of profit in this way.

However, the emergence of the credit business is not only a prerequisite for the further expansion of capital accumulation from a certain stage onwards—but the

accumulation of capital also produces the credit business. This is because industrial capitalists must first save enough of their profits for every major investment until they can afford the investment. In the meantime, they accumulate profit in the form of money, which for the time being cannot be invested in the production of surplus value, i.e. does not function as capital. From the point of view of the capitalist, who must always strive to ensure that his money yields a profit at all times, this is a waste. This money is "*absolutely unproductive [...], runs parallel with the process of production in this form, but lies outside of it. It is a deadweight of capitalist production. The eagerness to utilise this surplus value accumulating as virtual money capital for the purpose of deriving profits or revenue [i.e. income, KP's note] from it finds its object accomplished in the credit system and 'papers' [i.e. the share system, KP's note]*" (Marx: Capital, Volume II, MECW 36, p. 498). As this money of the industrial capitalist flows into the credit and share system, it can be channeled elsewhere into productive investments and then at least yields interest for the capitalist.

Bank credit also had an impact on society as a whole: it did not simply redistribute income, but enabled the productive capitalist to hire more workers and invest more quickly. The credit system thus increases the turnover rate of capital or reduces the turnover time. Capital can realize surplus value more quickly and reinvest more quickly. As this cycle takes place in a shorter time, more surplus value is produced overall than would otherwise have been the case.

4.6.2 Fictitious capital

As we have seen, the lending business becomes a separate field of activity for capital. In fact, money lenders and banks existed long before capitalism, but it is only under capitalism that they can play a truly central role. It is only under capitalism that surplus value is systematically produced and accumulated, making it possible to take out loans on a large scale and pay interest without necessarily impoverishing the debtor. The part of capital that derives its income primarily from interest is called interest-bearing capital. The income of interest-bearing capital depends on how many trustworthy borrowers it finds, whether the loans are repaid (because of course every loan default is a loss for the bank) and, above all, how high the interest rate is. The bank cannot set the interest rate arbitrarily, but must be guided by the average interest rate on the credit market. In contrast to the average rate of profit, which depends on the production of surplus value, the interest rate is determined by the supply and demand for loan capital.

Interest-bearing capital does not carry out the movement ‚money—commodity—money' (M—C—M'), as productive capital does. Instead, the money is lent to a productive capitalist, who then invests it in order to produce goods, thereby realizing surplus value and finally repaying part of this surplus value as interest. The movement of interest-bearing capital, if it is based on productive capital, therefore looks like this:

M—M—C—M'—M'

From the point of view of interest-bearing capital, however, it is irrelevant what happens to the lent money in the meantime. The bank is only interested in ensuring that the loan and the interest are repaid on time. For the bank, the formula for capital accumulation is therefore simple: M—M'. Money that creates more money. Interest-bearing capital therefore looks as if it is simply creating a profit out of nothing. You can no longer see that profit is created in production. Just as the commodity fetish creates the illusion that the relationships of commodities are simply natural movements of things, the interest fetish creates the idea that you can simply "make your money work for you", i.e. that money can somehow miraculously multiply by itself.

In addition to the classic credit business, in which a capitalist goes to a bank and negotiates a loan with it on certain terms, there are also other forms of interest-bearing capital than bank capital. The most important form at this point is share capital. Large companies usually go public and become stock corporations whose shares can be bought by anyone with money. Anyone who buys a share, a security in a company, thereby gives the company a loan and formally becomes a co-owner of the company through this act, even if the ownership of one or a few shares does not actually confer any real co-determination rights. The share (unlike the bank loan) is a claim to a share in the company. Unlike a bank loan, it is not repaid once and expires, but remains in existence and yields a regular dividend, i.e. a share of the company's profit.

This results in a peculiar "doubling" of capital: the capital invested in production, e.g. in the form of machinery, electricity, factory buildings, etc., continues to exist and is used to produce added value. At the same time, however, this capital exists a second time as a claim to ownership in the form of the security. The security itself is worth nothing, but it is treated and traded as if it were real capital. This capital is referred to as **fictitious capital** because, strictly speaking, it is not real capital, but only the claim to real capital, as a title of ownership with which one lays claim to expected future profits (in the case of shares) or value already created in the past (corporate bonds, government bonds, etc.). The fictitious nature of this capital is also reflected in the fact that its price is only indirectly related to the real production of value. This is because securities are traded on the capital market according to a price that is determined by supply and demand for the security. Since supply and demand follow different factors, the pricing of securities can take place relatively independently of real profit prospects.

Just as capital "doubles" with the creation of fictitious capital, the capitalist also breaks down into two different functions. On the one hand, there is the functioning capitalist, the user of capital, who supervises and organizes the accumulation of capital and the exploitation of labor power. On the other hand, there is the capitalist as owner, who is not involved in the production process but nevertheless lays claim to ownership of the capital. Both functions can be combined in the

same person, as is still the case in most smaller family businesses today. However, they can also be separate: Then one (or several) capitalists own the company, while they hire a manager who takes care of the operational business for a salary. However, even if the acting capitalist receives a "wage" in form, he is not a worker, but a capitalist, as he organizes the exploitation of labor power.

A frequently heard opinion on interest-bearing/fictitious capital is that banks are a form of capital particularly worthy of criticism because they receive interest income without doing anything for it themselves. This view is wrong for two reasons: firstly, all capital is a form of social parasitism. For even the industrial capitalist does not produce the surplus value himself, but gains it from the exploitation of other people's labor. Secondly, interest-bearing capital is an inevitable part of capitalism and fulfills a function within it by shortening the turnover time of capital and thus promoting the accumulation of capital overall. It therefore makes no sense to only want to abolish interest, while exploitation itself continues to exist.

Working questions

- **Why does a credit system arise in capitalism? What functions does it fulfill?**
- **What is fictitious capital and why is it called that?**

Discussion questions

- **Various theories propose an economic model in which there would still be private companies and wage labor, but no more interest. Would this be a solution or at least an improvement?**

4.7 Monopoly, finance capital and imperialism

The development of capitalism goes hand in hand with the law that more and more capital is concentrated in the hands of capitalists. The accumulation of capital means nothing other than that surplus value is repeatedly invested in order to keep the company's capital growing, so that the amount of capital that an individual capitalist has under his command becomes ever greater. Accumulation and **concentration of capital** are therefore just different expressions for the same process.

At the same time, competition between capitalists also leads to stronger capitalists forcing weaker capitalists out of the market by selling their goods more cheaply than the latter (or with higher quality, etc.). They then take over their market shares and employ more workers in order to be able to expand their production. Or they buy up other capitals or merge with them (mergers and acquisitions). In all these different cases, the result is ultimately the same, namely that instead of the many smaller capitals, a few larger ones now control production

and the sale of goods. This process is known as the **centralization of capital**. While the concentration of capital is simply the growth of the working capital of a single capitalist through the accumulation of surplus value, centralization refers to the merging of existing but separately accumulating capitals into fewer units and under the command of a smaller number of capitalists.

Both processes are progressing inexorably in capitalism. They lead to ever larger areas of the economy being dominated by an ever smaller number of companies. While in the first half of the 19th century a large number of companies were still competing with each other in the vast majority of industries, this changed at the end of the 19th century. Huge corporations now emerged that divided up entire industries and managed to largely dominate them. In Germany, for example, the electrical industry at the beginning of the 20th century was dominated by the two groups AEG and Siemens, the chemical industry by BASF, Hoechst, Bayer and Agfa, the iron and steel industry also by a few groups such as Thyssen, Krupp, Hoesch and Mannesmann and the banking sector by Deutsche Bank, Darmstädter Bank (later Danat Bank), Dresdner Bank, Commerzbank and Disconto-Gesellschaft. The situation was similar in England, France, the USA and Japan.

The credit system proved to be a very important lever for the concentration and centralization of capital. By collecting idle capital from all sectors of the economy and channeling it into promising investments, by giving large companies easier access to fresh capital than small capitalists, by opening up new opportunities for financing for large companies through the share system, but also for taking over other companies, the financial system contributes enormously to the concentration of ever larger masses of capital under one command.

4.7.1 Monopoly capital

Large companies that can control entire sectors of the economy alone or together with a few competitors are known as **monopoly capital**. In Marxist theory, we also speak of monopolies when there are several but few companies that control a branch, although monopoly actually means "sole seller" in ancient Greek. Nevertheless, this broader use of the term monopoly makes sense because the economic phenomenon is basically the same whether an economic sector is dominated by one or a few companies. In both cases, monopoly capital can raise prices through its control of sales. Even if there are several monopoly capitalists in an industry, experience has shown that they rarely engage in undercutting competition in terms of prices, but rather jointly exploit their position to achieve extra profits through higher prices. These extra profits mean nothing other than that part of the surplus value created by other, non-monopolistic companies flows to the monopoly capitalists due to the monopoly prices and reduces the profits of the small capitalists. Conversely, the monopolies can often impose low prices on their suppliers because they are dependent on the large monopoly with their supply relationships and are largely at its mercy. Of course, there is no reason for the

Forms of monopoly

In the history of capitalism, various forms of monopoly capital have emerged. The simplest forms of monopoly are short-term agreements on sales prices. If a longer-term partnership is formed, in which agreements are made on the quantity of goods output, prices, division of sales markets and the like, this is known as a cartel. In a cartel, the individual companies remain independent. In contrast, a trust is a monopoly where various companies have joined together to achieve a monopoly position and control prices. Another form of monopoly is the group, in which there are still subordinate individual companies that are formally independent but are under the control of and financially dependent on the group's headquarters. Today, the group is an extremely influential and widespread form of monopoly.

working class to feel any sympathy for the non-monopoly capitalists—because they are still their exploiters and precisely because their leeway is reduced by monopoly capital, they try all the harder to increase their profits by paying workers low wages and often unleashing a veritable war against any form of trade union organization.

The transition to the age of monopoly capitalism was no coincidence, but became inevitable with the development of capitalism. The introduction of new production processes in the course of the second wave of the Industrial Revolution at the end of the 19th century led to a sharp increase in the organic composition of capital. This meant that ever more expensive production processes were used, which meant huge capital expenditure that smaller companies could not afford. Production in the new branches of industry (such as the electrical and chemical industries, and then increasingly also the automotive industry) could only be organized profitably and sensibly on a large scale. This inevitably led to monopolies, because the threshold of minimum capital that a capitalist had to invest in order to be able to enter these industries at all became higher and higher, which meant that there were fewer and fewer competitors for the large monopolies.

4.7.2 Financial capital

The rapid development of industry in the leading capitalist countries (which now included the German Reich) promoted the centralization of capital on the one hand, but on the other hand also made it a prerequisite, as ever greater amounts of capital were needed to enable industrial production at the modern technical level. Interest-bearing capital in the form of banks and joint stock companies played an indispensable role here. Banks were not only lenders to industry, but also developed close relationships with industrial groups by appointing representatives to their supervisory boards and acquiring shares in industrial companies.

Joint stock companies developed as an alternative form of financing for industrial companies.

In both cases, we are dealing with a new type of relationship between interest-bearing and productive capital. On the basis of the developments described above and following the Social Democratic economist Rudolf Hilferding, Lenin speaks of ever closer relations between bank capital and industrial capital and even of a fusion of the two types of capital. However, this merger does not mean that banks and industrial groups cease to exist as separate companies. But through the stock exchange share system, banks and other companies have the opportunity to buy shares in an industrial group and thus influence its business strategy.

Lenin writes: "*At the same time a personal link-up, so to speak, is established between the banks and the biggest industrial and commercial enterprises, the merging of one with another through the acquisition of shares, through the appointment of bank directors to the Supervisory Boards (or Boards of Directors) of industrial and commercial enterprises, and vice versa*". And: *"The result is, on the one hand, the ever-growing merger, or, as N. I. Bukharin aptly calls it, coalescence, of bank and industrial capital and, on the other hand, the growth of the banks into institutions of a truly 'universal character'* (Lenin: Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism, LCW 22, p. 220, 223).

The separation of capital ownership from functioning capital by fictitious capital means that, from the investors' point of view, industrial capital also carries out the movement of fictitious capital: The capital invested in the shares of an industrial concern also simply throws off returns (the movement M—M'), without the investing capitalist himself having invested it in production in order to buy machines, pay workers, etc. Lenin writes: "*It is characteristic of capitalism in general that the ownership of capital is separated from the application of capital to production, that money capital is separated from industrial or productive capital, and that the rentier who lives entirely on income obtained from money capital, is separated from the entrepreneur and from all who are directly concerned in the management of capital.*" (ibid., p. 238). But in monopoly capital these phenomena attain a new quality. The industrial monopolies themselves are also organized in such a way that they are oriented towards the accumulation of fictitious capital, of property titles to capital. What Lenin is describing here is a new kind of capital. He calls this fusion of banking and industrial capital financial capital. Financial capital therefore consists not only of banks, insurance companies, etc., but also of industrial monopolies. The capitalists who control this monopolistic finance capital can also be described as a financial oligarchy, as they are a small class of people who can generate huge returns simply by virtue of their ownership of finance capital, control the majority of the economy, squeeze a portion of the surplus value from the non-monopolistic capitalists and thus concentrate enormous power in their hands. "*The supremacy of finance capital over all other forms of capital means the predominance of the rentier ['rentiers' here refers to people*

who receive a constant cash income solely through their ownership of money capital without any work of their own and without productive investment, KP's note] and of the financial oligarchy" (ibid., p. 238-239).

The concepts of finance capital and monopoly capital are inextricably linked. It was the transition from capitalism of free competition to monopoly capitalism that brought about the emergence of the huge joint-stock companies and the tight network of banks and industry. The emergence and competition of the monopolies necessarily required the form of finance capital, as this was the only way to raise the huge amounts of capital required for the modern technologies in the capitalism of the late 19th century and early 20th century.

Discussions about the definition of the term "financial capital"

There is a debate as to whether the definition of finance capital as a fusion of industrial and bank capital is still suitable for correctly describing today's reality. On the one hand, there is the position that Lenin's definition of finance capital, as presented above, is still fully valid. According to this, national characteristics in corporate financing are of secondary importance and do not change the fact that we can continue to speak of finance capital as the fusion of banking and industrial capital.

This position has been repeatedly criticized in recent decades. Numerous authors have pointed out that the close network of banks and industrial companies, with the banks controlling industry through share ownership and supervisory board mandates, was more of a specific form that prevailed in Germany and some other industrialized countries, but was not to be found everywhere. Moreover, this network has also largely dissolved in Germany since the 1980s/90s, as the banks have sold the majority of their shares in industrial groups. The term "finance capital" for this type of "merger" therefore makes little sense. For the most part, proponents of this position therefore simply use the term "financial capital" for fictitious capital.

There is also a third position on this question: representatives of this interpretation share the criticism that the definition of finance capital as the fusion of banks with industry falls short of the mark and that it tends to describe national characteristics and certain phases of development of imperialist capitalism. According to them, banks, for example, do not play an equally important role everywhere, and there are also other forms of interest-bearing capital that play an important role today (e.g. investment funds, pension funds, insurance companies, etc.). However, these authors argue, unlike the representatives of the second position, that the concept of financial capital does not refer to the merging of the institutions of banks and industrial companies or their re-

spective institutional functions, but to a merging of ownership. With the development of monopoly capitalism, capital ownership in the hands of the financial oligarchy becomes increasingly independent of the production of surplus value and the direct realization of returns (i.e. the process M—M' instead of M—C—M') increasingly becomes the predominant form of capital accumulation. According to this position, finance capital is therefore more than just fictitious capital, but refers to the connection between the accumulation of fictitious and productive capital under the predominance of fictitious capital and thus the fusion of the monopolized capital ownership of the different types of capital in the hands of the financial oligarchy.

We will discuss the concept of finance capital as part of the clarification process.

4.7.3 The imperialist stage of capitalism

Monopoly capitalism, however, is not merely a technical change in capitalism, but an epoch in its own right, a stage in the development of capitalism. Lenin speaks of monopoly capitalism as the imperialist stage of capitalism. According to Lenin, imperialism has five fundamental characteristics:

"*1. concentration of production and capital, which has reached such a high stage of development that it creates monopolies which play the decisive role in economic life.*

2. the merging of bank capital with industrial capital and the emergence of a financial oligarchy on the basis of this "finance capital".

3. the export of capital, as distinct from the export of goods, becomes particularly important.

4. international monopolistic associations of capitalists are formed, dividing the world among themselves,

and 5. the territorial division of the earth among the great capitalist powers is ended" (ibid., p. 266).

We have already dealt with the first two points. Points 3 to 5 concern the international expansion of monopoly capital. Lenin showed that monopoly capital accumulates a constant capital surplus, i.e. that the monopolies accumulate more surplus value than they can profitably invest in their own country. This is due to the nature of monopoly capital: because the market for a particular product is already divided among a few monopoly capitalists and is dominated by them, the possibilities for further expansion of production are limited. If the monopoly capitalists do so anyway, they increase the supply of goods and thus push down

the prices of their own goods, which they were able to increase precisely because of their monopoly position. Under these conditions, investing in an expansion of production only leads to lower prices, but not to higher profits for the monopolies.

However, the profit rate is also the decisive factor for monopoly capital on which investment decisions depend. Monopoly capital must therefore look for profitable investment opportunities elsewhere. It often only finds these abroad, in other developed imperialist countries, or in less developed countries. The imperialist era is therefore characterized not only by the export of goods, which of course continues to play a major role, but especially by the export of capital. The monopolies look for favorable opportunities to make profits all over the world, they establish branches and subsidiaries, buy up other companies or merge with them. This creates the international monopoly associations of which Lenin speaks. However, these do not become "global" in the sense that they no longer have any nationality or special ties to the nation state.

In the imperialist stage of development of capitalism, the territorial division of the world has also come to an end. This means that there are no longer any large areas that are not claimed by anyone. The only way for the monopolies and their states to conquer new sales and investment areas is to wrest these territories from other powers and capital groups. And this struggle is indeed ongoing: The ended division of the world is thus inevitably followed by a constant struggle for the redivision of the world, which is sometimes carried out by "peaceful" means, i.e. through the export of goods and capital, diplomacy, secret services, etc., but always also through war.

It is a law of capitalism, and especially of imperialist capitalism with its internationally exacerbated contradictions, that the accumulation of capital develops very differently from region to region and from country to country. The complex interplay of competitive struggles, political strategies of the bourgeoisie, conflicts between capitalists, wars and economic crises causes certain countries and regions to rise in the hierarchy of the imperialist world system, while others descend in relative terms. As a result, there is a fundamental possibility that countries with formerly backward capitalist development (e.g. China, partly India, Brazil, etc.) will also rise in the international imperialist hierarchy and challenge the old imperialist leading powers.

War over resources, sales markets, trade routes etc. becomes a necessity in imperialism. Often these are wars waged by the leading imperialist powers in order to gain or retain control of underdeveloped countries. But there are also constant tensions between the leading imperialist states and blocs, in which there is always the danger that they will escalate into direct military confrontation. The two world wars of the 20th century were the result of these inter-imperialist conflicts. As weapons technology continues to develop, the level of destruction and human suffering caused by imperialist wars also increases.

As terrible as war is for the majority of the people affected by it, from the point of view of capital it is merely the continuation of politics by other means, just as, conversely, politics in peacetime is merely the continuation of war by other means. Imperialism inevitably produces the tendency to aggression outwards.

If imperialism consists above all in the domination of the big monopolies, i.e. a tiny minority of big capitalists, shouldn't almost all people be against this system? As a rule, this is not the case, because on the one hand the non-monopoly capitalists are still interested in exploiting the working class and continue to defend their still privileged position as exploiters. On the other hand, in the leading imperialist countries there is also a differentiation in the working class. Due to the monopolistic extra profits that capital can accumulate in the developed imperialist countries, the scope for these capitalists to pay higher wages to a section of the working class, to entice them with secure working conditions, etc. is increasing. So for a section of the working class in developed imperialist countries like Germany, the US, etc., the standard of living rises significantly. Other workers, often in the same company, but of course also in other sectors and even more so in other countries, are less fortunate and must continue to live on wages that are barely enough to survive, or not even that. The layer of privileged workers, the "labor aristocracy" as Lenin calls it, now tends to try to defend its standard of living, even if this is at the expense of other sections of the working class. We will see later: The emergence of the labor aristocracy is the social and economic basis for the spread of opportunism in the labor movement.

4.7.4 Imperialism as overripe capitalism

Lenin spoke of imperialism as "*highly developed, mature and rotten-ripe capitalism*" (ibid., p. 103). The fact that capitalism has become "overripe" means that it represents a historically outdated mode of production and social order. While the bourgeoisie played a progressive role in its early days by eliminating feudalism and unleashing the development of the productive forces, it has now long since entered an age in which capital and the private ownership of the means of production have become obstacles to further social progress. This does not mean that capitalism in its monopolistic stage would no longer produce technical progress, because on the contrary, the huge agglomerations of capital that constitute the modern corporation can also raise huge sums for research and development. This means that capitalism is an inefficient, wasteful and destructive system compared to what would be possible with the level of productive forces already achieved. Monopoly capital prevents new inventions because they do not bring any decisive advantage in the face of high monopoly profits; it leads to ever more severe crises, which are accompanied by enormous destruction of productive forces and human misery; it produces devastating wars and can only develop at the price of enormous environmental destruction. Most of the surplus value is appropriated by a tiny minority of financial oligarchs, whose wealth is growing to ever more grotesque heights, while the broad mass of people on the planet struggle daily to

survive. This financial oligarchy no longer plays a role in production and is completely superfluous to it. It exists only to siphon off profit on the basis of its ownership and thus demonstrates in perfect form how superfluous the capitalist class is for the development of humanity. In short: in imperialism, all the contradictions of capitalism are taken to the extreme—to an ever more intolerable degree and threatening the survival of humanity in the long term. Lenin therefore described imperialism as the "*parasitism and decay of capitalism*" (ibid., p. 193).

At the same time, however, monopoly capitalism also prepares the transition to another, higher social formation, socialism. With the development of capitalism, production takes on an increasingly social character. This **socialization of production** under capitalist conditions consists in the fact that all parts of economic life are interdependent and production can increasingly no longer be regarded as the production of the individual company, but as an overall economic organism. The more complex the products become, the greater the degree of socialization: for example, cars are not produced in a single company, but the final production is dependent on countless intermediate products from other companies, often (for cost reasons) also from abroad. However, while labor is increasingly socialized in this way, the means of production and the products themselves remain the private property of the capitalists.

The socialization of production, but also the concentration and centralization of capital, create very favorable conditions for wrestling production from the control of capital and placing it under the command of an overall social plan. This is because an economic system such as feudalism or early manufacturing capitalism, with a confusing multitude of tiny production units, can hardly be centrally planned. On the other hand, a form of "planned economy" is already taking place in the large monopoly groups anyway, except that the planning takes place in each group individually and is oriented towards the profit of the company rather than social needs.

Marx wrote about the form of the joint stock company that it already represents the "*abolition of capital as private property within the framework of the capitalist mode of production itself*" (Marx: Capital, Volume III, MECW 37, p. 434). Private ownership of the means of production still applies, but the company is no longer the sole property of an individual capitalist; instead, capital is collected from the whole of society via the share system and bank credit and fed into the joint-stock company, even if there are still very powerful capitalists who alone hold large shares and can control the joint-stock companies through them. This is analogous to the procedure in a planned economy, where the central plan can also mobilize resources from the whole of society in order to achieve certain production goals. At the same time, capitalism has allowed the working class to grow enormously, with the urban petty bourgeoisie and peasants shrinking in numbers or merging into the working class. The working class is both the most important productive force and the revolutionary class in capitalist society. The fact that the most important areas of production are applied by the working class is an important

aspect that indicates the maturity of today's society for the transition to socialism. This is because the social force that must smash capitalism and take production and the organization of the entire life of society into its own hands already exists.

If monopoly capitalism already means the socialization of production at a high level, is it perhaps possible for the state to simply take control of the monopolies and thus peacefully introduce socialism by law?

No, unfortunately that is impossible. First of all, it must be emphasized that although production under capitalism is increasingly socialized, the appropriation of surplus value remains in private hands because the means of production are still private property. Only the expropriation of the capitalists makes it possible for production to be planned according to social needs. However, private ownership of the means of production can only be abolished by a revolution of the working class, not by the state itself. We will look at why this is the case in the chapter on the bourgeois state.

Working questions

- **What is the difference between concentration and centralization of capital?**
- **What is monopoly capital in Marxist theory?**
- **What five basic characteristics of imperialism does Lenin mention and what do they mean?**

Discussion questions

- **After all, capitalism is already in itself an exploitative, parasitic order. Does it nevertheless make sense to describe imperialism as rotting, parasitic, dying capitalism?**

The discussion about the theory of imperialism

In the International Communist Movement, different, sometimes contradictory analyses of imperialism are advocated. One fundamental issue is the controversy surrounding so-called "collective imperialism". This thesis, which was at times advocated by parts of the DKP, assumed that in today's imperialism the conflicts between the imperialist powers had greatly diminished and that they would instead jointly subjugate the rest of the world. This made wars between imperialist powers very unlikely or impossible. Collective imperialism" is therefore a new edition of Kautsky's 'ultra-imperialism' theory. However, the renewed intensification of political and economic

conflicts between the USA and the Western European countries on the one hand and China and Russia on the other, the tendencies towards division in the EU, etc. show that inter-imperialist conflicts have by no means disappeared, but always carry the danger of armed conflict.

Another important controversy revolves around whether imperialism should be understood as a stage in the development of capitalism that prevails globally. According to this position, imperialism is to be understood as a world system that basically encompasses the entire capitalist world, but is structured very hierarchically. The USA is still at the top of this pyramid, but Germany is also very high up. At the bottom of the hierarchy are still the poorest and most underdeveloped countries. In between, however, there are various layers of countries that do not belong to the top tier of imperialist leading powers, but also exhibit characteristics of imperialism and whose monopoly capital pursues its own goals. Relations between the countries are not simply characterized by one-sided dependence, but can be described as mutual, albeit very unequal, dependence.

On the other hand, there is the position that there are still only a handful of imperialist countries, while the absolute majority of countries are simply oppressed and dependent countries. There are two variants of this theory: while Maoists, for example, also classify Russia and China in the category of imperialist countries, the DKP assumes that Russia and China are not imperialist, but actually have an anti-imperialist character. However, both variants are problematic, as they cannot properly explain the role of countries that occupy an intermediate position within the imperialist pyramid and strive to exercise global leadership. They absolutize the dependency relations between countries and fail to see that the balance of power is constantly changing due to the uneven development of imperialism. They ignore the fact that it is therefore also possible for countries to weaken their dependency under certain conditions and rise within the hierarchy of the imperialist pyramid.

However, a false theory of imperialism always leads to a false practice, which manifests itself, for example, in solidarity with China or Russia, or in the fact that states that are attacked by the USA or other imperialist leading powers are erroneously assessed as anti-imperialist, although in reality they are not fighting imperialism as a system, but only the policy of a particular imperialist state.

4.8 Business cycle and crisis

For most bourgeois economists and the prevailing bourgeois economic theory, crises are avoidable industrial accidents triggered by misconduct on the part of politicians or "external shocks", i.e. the influence of non-economic events on the economy. According to these theories, steady economic growth is therefore possible if only the framework conditions are right. However, a look at reality shows that these views are little more than propaganda with an academic veneer: Since the emergence of capitalism, the accumulation of capital has been interrupted at relatively regular intervals by crises in which masses of workers become unemployed, large quantities of goods and capital are destroyed and companies go bankrupt. But how do these crises occur in capitalism, what makes them possible and why do they necessarily happen?

Anyone who believes that a single mechanism in Marx's theory can fully explain the crises is bound to be disappointed. The search for an independent "crisis theory" in Marx is also in vain. For the crisis is a necessary form of movement of the capitalist mode of production. It results from the development of capitalist society as a whole and the impact of all its elements on each other. This is why Marx's theory of crises and his analysis of the capitalist mode of production are inseparable. This is what makes the understanding of crises such a complex matter. Marx developed reflections on the emergence of economic crises in capitalism at various points in his work. Here we will attempt to present his core ideas on this issue.

4.8.1 Profit rate and crisis

For Marx, as already mentioned, the rate of profit is the decisive factor on which the accumulation of capital depends: "*The rate of profit is the motive power of capitalist production. Things are produced only so long as they can be produced with a profit.*" (Marx: Capital, Volume III, MECW 37, p. 258) The fact that crises occur at all is therefore due to the fact that in capitalism "*the expansion or contraction of production are determined by [...] a definite rate of profit, rather than by the relation of production to social requirements, i. e., to the requirements of socially developed human beings*" (ibid., p. 257).

The rise and fall of the rate of profit is therefore the factor that causes economic upswings and downswings. If the rate of profit is high, capitalists have many opportunities where they can invest their profits profitably—and they never leave these opportunities unused. However, if the rate of profit falls, investment opportunities are inevitably restricted. This does not mean that there is no longer a social need to expand production further. After all, there are hardly ever enough hospitals, apartments or swimming pools under capitalism. It just means that there are no more profitable investment opportunities for capital. For example, there may not be sufficient housing available, however all those looking for housing have either an empty bank account or cannot afford the expensive rents.

We have already seen that, in any case, the rate of profit falls in the long term. So if the profit rate on average takes on an increasingly lower value, this means that upswings tend to be weaker and crises and downturns tend to be longer, more frequent, and deeper. We can therefore see that the development logic of capitalism inevitably means that crises worsen over time. But why can a crisis occur in capitalism in the first place?

4.8.2 The possibility of crises

The fact that crises are possible at all is already rooted in the most fundamental characteristic of the capitalist mode of production: in the fact that under capitalism everything tends to become a commodity, i.e. is produced for sale on the market. Capitalists are only interested in their goods being sold and the value of the goods flowing into their pockets as income. If, on the other hand, they have produced a pile of goods that cannot be sold, even though there may be a great social need for them, they will do everything in their power to avoid distributing these goods to the population free of charge. This would further reduce the price of goods and jeopardize their future profits. But the fact that they cannot sell the goods now means that profits will fall or disappear altogether. Even if the capitalists still have money in reserve, they will no longer invest it in expanding their production, as this would of course only exacerbate the overproduction. If they have no reserves, they may now have to go into debt to cover their expenses or be unable to repay their existing debts.

This type of crisis, the overproduction crisis, is a new phenomenon that only emerged with capitalism. In feudalism or earlier societies, crises always arose from shortages, e.g. because there was a failed harvest or a war. Capitalist crises, on the other hand, are crises of abundance: there are too many produced goods, but not too many in terms of social needs, but in terms of solvent demand. Marx and Engels write. "*In these crises there breaks out an epidemic2 that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity—the epidemic of over-production. Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce*" (Marx/Engels: Manifesto of the Communist Party, MECW 6, p. 489–490).

Like today's liberal economists, the bourgeois economists of Marx's time assumed that supply and demand would automatically reach an equilibrium and that crises would therefore not occur in the first place—the so-called Say's law. This "law" was justified by the fact that every sale of a commodity is also a purchase of a commodity, so the sum of the goods bought is inevitably equal to the sum of the goods sold. This blunt statement is of course correct, but it in no way means that demand and supply are in harmony. Because even if every purchase presupposes

a sale, this does not mean that everyone who has sold something must also immediately buy something. When I sell a product of my work, I do not directly receive another good (i.e. the product of someone else's work) in return, but generally a sum of money. Under capitalism, nobody can tell me what to do with this money, which comes between the sale and the new purchase, which do not coincide in time. This makes it possible for a commodity to be produced that nobody then buys. In addition, however, "Say's law" simply assumes that exactly the goods that are in demand are always produced. However, since there is a huge variety of different goods, which can also be divided into different production departments (production of means of production, consumer goods, etc.), this assumption is nonsense. Even if there is sufficient demand in the economy as a whole, this does not help if forklift trucks are produced in abundance, which the ordinary worker is unlikely to buy, even if he has the money to do so. Crises therefore also arise from the fact that such imbalances occur between different sectors of the economy in the course of economic development. This is unavoidable, however, because capitalist production is not subject to any central planning authority, but asserts itself as an uncontrolled and essentially uncontrollable blind law.

4.8.3 The capitalist business cycle

All this, however, still does not explain why production expands and contracts at regular intervals, why there is no uniform growth but a business cycle with booms and busts. Generally speaking, this is the case because capital accumulation constantly changes the conditions under which it takes place—and changes them in such a way that every upswing in accumulation creates the conditions for the downswing.

So let's take a look at the capitalist business cycle: for there to be a boom, there must be sufficient solvent demand for commodities, as well as sufficient investment-seeking capital in the hands of capitalists, and sufficient labor-seeking workers who can find employment in expanding industrial production. Now the capitalists invest in the expansion of their production and sales. In return, they make major purchases to modernize production, i.e. new machines with the associated technology. They also hire new workers to operate these machines. As a result, unemployment decreases and the workers are generally able to push through higher wages, meaning that the price of labor increases. In the same way, the prices of machines and other means of production also rise, as the capitalists now buy these on a large scale. Production therefore becomes more expensive, which is not a problem as long as the social demand for goods continues to grow.

But this is precisely where the problem lies: in the long term, demand does not grow evenly in relation to the supply of goods. At the beginning of the cycle, larger investments are made, which gives the demand for means of production a boost. These investments then increase productivity, meaning that more goods are produced with the existing number of workers. While demand initially increases in

spurts and the production of both consumer goods and means of production is stimulated, this effect diminishes after a while. However, the supply of goods was expanded during the upswing phase, both in material terms (a larger mass of consumer goods) and in terms of value (because more hours were worked, the total value of goods increased). At a certain point, this quantity of goods can no longer be sold in full. Sales in the consumer goods industries suffer from the fact that, despite wage increases during the upswing, the majority of consumers are still poor and can only buy the goods produced to a very limited extent. At the same time, however, the increasing scarcity of labor can cause wages to rise to such an extent that the profits of capitalists in some industries fall sharply. On the one hand, Marx writes here: "*The ultimate reason for all real crises always remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses as opposed to the drive of capi- talist production to develop the productive forces as though only the absolute consuming power of society constituted their limit*" (Marx: Capital, Volume III, MECW 37, p. 483). On the other hand, he also emphasizes "*that crises are always prepared by precisely a period in which wages rise generally*" (Marx: Capital, Volume III, MECW 36, p. 409). These two factors only seem to contradict each other: it is quite possible that the supply of consumer goods has been expanded to such an extent that the purchasing power of the working class is no longer sufficient to buy them, and at the same time the industries with a high input of labor get into difficulties due to wage increases at the very moment when the economy in general is approaching the point of overproduction. At the same time, the means of production industries are dependent on capitalists continuing to buy machinery etc. in order to make their productive investments. However, this tends to happen at the beginning of the upswing and less and less later on, because the new investments have to be profitable first. Profit prospects also tend to deteriorate and investments become more cautious. Finally, the increase in productivity achieved by the new investments also means that the proportion of constant capital (i.e. machines, raw materials, etc.) increases, i.e. the organic composition of capital increases. As shown above, the rate of profit must ultimately fall as a result.

We can therefore see that the business cycle is dependent on the investment cycles of capital. Fixed capital in particular, which is invested over longer periods of time and is then tied up for the time being, plays a decisive role here. Marx writes: "*As the magnitude of the value and the durability of the applied fixed capital develop with the development of the capitalist mode of production, the lifetime of industry and of industrial capital lengthens in each particular field of investment to a period of many years, say of ten years on an average. [...] The cycle of interconnected turnovers embracing a number of years, in which capital is held fast by its fixed constituent part, furnishes a material basis for the periodic crises. During this cycle business undergoes successive periods of depression, medium activity, precipitancy, crisis*." (Marx: Capital, Volume II, MECW 36, p. 187). The exact number of ten years is irrelevant, as Marx says, because the duration can also change. What is important is that the movement of industry goes through a regular cycle in which upswings and downswings alternate.

Are overproduction and underconsumption the same thing?

Many who refer to Marxist theory see the decisive reason for the emergence of crises in the fact that the working class is paid too low wages under capitalism. The economic cycle therefore regularly reaches a point where the solvent demand for consumer goods is too low to be able to buy the goods produced. This approach to explaining crises is known as the underconsumption theory. Some, though not all, proponents of this theory conclude that the working class must fight for higher wages, not only to improve their own standard of living, but also to prevent crises.

However, there is also criticism of the underconsumption theory. Critics argue that it is an arbitrary assumption that overproduction must inevitably take place in the consumer goods department. In the same way, overproduction of means of production could also occur. Since technical progress and the increase in the organic composition of capital tend to increase the share of means of production in total production, the overproduction of means of production becomes increasingly important as a cause of crisis as the level of development of capitalism increases. The decisive causes of the crisis are seen by critics of the underconsumption theory in the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, in the rise in wages during the economic upswing, in general imbalances between the various sectors of the economy or in a combination of the various factors.

4.8.4 Crisis and recession

The crisis now manifests itself in the fact that masses of goods can no longer find a buyer. This means that the capitalists who have produced these goods are now finding it increasingly difficult to balance their expenditure. At the same time, the overproduction is not only of goods, but also of capital, i.e. overaccumulation. Over-accumulation means that there is investment-seeking capital lying idle due to the lack of opportunities for profitable investment, i.e. it is not being put to productive use.

The development of the credit system had accelerated and expanded the accumulation of capital during the upswing by shortening the turnover time of capital. Now credit is becoming a lever that exacerbates the crisis. This is because many capitalists who have taken out loans now have to repay them without having the means to do so. They therefore go bankrupt and have to stop production. As a result, the crisis is now spreading to the banks, whose balance sheets are piling up "bad" loans that can no longer be serviced. Other companies survive, but reduce their production in view of the already existing oversupply of goods and lay off some of their workers. Part of the working class thus becomes unemployed and

enters the industrial reserve army, while the wages of other workers also fall as competition among workers increases due to mass unemployment.

There is now also a slump in investment, as no capitalist invests his money to expand the production of unsaleable goods. Overall social demand therefore falls, making the crisis a self-perpetuating process: production is reduced even further and more workers are laid off. The upswings and downswings of capital accumulation thus go hand in hand with upswings and downswings in the hiring of workers. In a recession, the "industrial reserve army" of the unemployed grows; in an upswing, it shrinks.

The crisis also leads to the destruction of value on a large scale. The overproduced goods are either directly destroyed on a large scale or expire before they can be consumed. Another part is not physically destroyed, but loses a large part of its value due to oversupply.

However, just as the upswing does not last forever, the downturn is also temporary. The dismissal of workers, the reduction of their wages, the destruction of capital and the resulting reduction in the cost of buying new means of production make production in some parts of the economy profitable again after a certain point. New investments are now being made again in these sectors, which in turn means new orders for the means of production industries (e.g. mechanical engineering, vehicles, construction industry, etc.). These too will now invest again in order to meet the growing demand. The whole cycle of upturn, crisis and downturn therefore starts all over again.

4.8.5 Are crises inevitable under capitalism?

Would it be possible to avoid the crisis? For example, by the state controlling investments so that they develop evenly? Or by capitalists simply stopping production as soon as all demand is saturated? Neither is possible under capitalism. The bourgeois state can set incentives for or against investment, e.g. through subsidies, the central bank's interest rate policy or the nationalization of some companies. However, in order to abolish the industrial cycle as such, every aspect of economic life, i.e. all investment decisions, the production quantities of all goods, the hiring and firing of workers, the level of wages, etc., would have to be centrally planned and prescribed. Capitalists would therefore no longer have any power of disposal over their property. Within capitalism, such a step is therefore impossible and no bourgeois state would allow it, let alone enforce it itself.

Overproduction is also unavoidable, even if the individual capitalists are aware of this threat. This is because competition makes it impossible for a single capitalist to simply cease production. It is precisely during a crisis that this competition between capitalists intensifies enormously. "*So long as things go well, competition effects an operating fraternity of the capitalist class, as we have seen in the case of the equalisation of the general rate of profit, so that each shares in the common loot*

in proportion to the size of his respective investment. But as soon as it no longer is a question of sharing profits, but of sharing losses, everyone tries to reduce his own share to a minimum and to shove it off upon another. The class, as such, must inevitably lose. How much the individual capitalist must bear of the loss, i.e., to what extent he must share in it at all, is decided by strength and cunning, and competition then becomes a fight among hostile brothers" (Marx: Capital, Volume III, MECW 37, p. 252). This is precisely why every capitalist tries to make his own goods even cheaper and sell as many of them as possible so that it is not he but the other capitalists who have to bear the losses.

While the concentration of capital (accumulation) comes to a standstill during the crisis, the centralization of capital accelerates. Previously separate capitals must join forces in order to counteract the dwindling mass of profit. This happens when companies merge with each other or are bought out by other capitalists. But it also happens when the crisis drives many capitalists into bankruptcy and their market shares and production capacities are then taken over by others.

4.8.6 The fundamental contradiction of the capitalist mode of production

It bears repeating that the crisis is not a deviation from the path of capitalist production, but rather an inevitable part of it. Ultimately, crises are an expression of the basic social contradiction of the capitalist mode of production: **the contradiction between increasingly socialized production and private appropriation.** This contradiction means that, on the one hand, production takes on an increasingly social character, while on the other hand, despite its social character, this production is not planned for society as a whole, but remains in the hands of the capitalists, who all produce for their private profit. Private profit remains the meaning and purpose of the entire mode of production, the profit rate the decisive motor. And if this engine stutters, the whole of society suffers. The stronger the socialization of production becomes and the higher the organic composition of capital, the deeper the crises tend to become, the more devastating the destruction of capital, goods and people.

This contradiction also manifests itself in the fact that, under conditions of private property, production is only planned centrally at the level of individual companies, while anarchy of production prevails in society as a whole, since all capitalists plan only for themselves. This cannot prevent imbalances between the various departments of production from occurring again and again and at periodic intervals.

The contradiction between social production and private appropriation is thus the particular form in which, under capitalism, the development of the productive forces enters into a contradiction with the relations of production—the progressive development of the productive forces has long since made another, high-

er form of social relations possible and necessary, namely socialism. The longer it is not realized, the sharper the contradiction between the productive forces and their increasingly inadequate capitalist "shell" becomes.

The crisis regularly indicates the bankruptcy of capitalism by demonstrating the absurdity of the entire mode of production: "*Their political and intellectual bankruptcy is scarcely any longer a secret to the bourgeoisie themselves. Their economic bankruptcy recurs regularly every ten years. In every crisis, society is suffocated beneath the weight of its own productive forces and products, which it cannot use, and stands helpless face to face with the absurd contradiction that the producers have nothing to consume, because consumers are wanting*" (Engels: Anti-Dühring, MECW 25, p. 269). On the one hand, there are masses of workers who are plunged into existential hardship and misery by the crisis and who lack even the bare necessities for survival; on the other hand, masses of consumer goods are also being destroyed. The fact that abundance and misery not only exist side by side in capitalism, but are in fact mutually dependent, is expressed more clearly in the crisis than ever before.

The crises have far-reaching effects on society as a whole. As has been shown, they exacerbate the contradictions between the capitalists, whose interests now collide directly with each other in the struggle for the distribution of losses. For the same reason, the antagonisms between the states within the imperialist world system are also intensifying. Major conflicts and wars between the imperialists are becoming more likely. The class struggle tends to take on sharper forms and there is a general increase in discontent and spontaneous unrest. In such a situation, the ruling class can resort to more direct and violent forms of class oppression, up to and including the transition to an openly fascist dictatorship. At the same time, however, the crisis also leads to the masses losing confidence in the ruling class and capitalism, which can make them more open to a revolutionary solution. But only when socialism has been fought for will it be possible to have an economic development in which economic progress serves those who produce it and is not regularly interrupted by crises in which the abundance of goods leads to masses of workers losing their jobs and livelihoods.

Working questions

- **Why are crises possible under capitalism?**
- **According to Marx, why do cyclical crises occur? According to Marx, what determines the intervals between crises?**

Discussion questions

- **Is it possible to achieve crisis-free development within capitalism? And would this be a sensible political demand?**

4.9 Classes in capitalism

We have now seen the economic laws of motion on which the division of capitalist society into classes is based. In earlier class societies, a strict hierarchy formalized by law prevailed. In feudalism, for example, promotion from one class to another was only possible in exceptional cases, as was marriage between members of different classes. In capitalism, on the other hand, all people are officially equal before the law as a rule—although there were and are countless exceptions here too, such as the open racist terror in fascist states, the apartheid systems in South Africa, the USA or today's Israel, through to the fact that women's suffrage was only introduced in capitalist countries in the course of the 20th century. Nevertheless, these various forms of discrimination are not the main mechanism on which capitalist class society is based.

4.9.1 The working class

This main mechanism is the exploitation of the working class by capital. Although legally equal, workers are forced to sell their labor power to the capitalist, who uses it to produce surplus value, which he appropriates. So while the capitalists accumulate wealth without working themselves, the workers are condemned to work without accumulating wealth. The profit of the capitalists, not the wages of the workers, is the measure of economic success under capitalism, because the development of society as a whole depends on the accumulation of capital. The working class and the capitalist class or bourgeoisie are the two main classes of capitalist society.

These classes are distinguished not simply by their level of income, as one distinguishes between "poor" and "rich", but by the nature of their income and their role in the social organization of labor (as planners or performers), which in turn derive from their position in the production process: Profit accrues to the capitalists because they own the means of production (for a general understanding of classes, see chapter 3.5 on historical materialism). The workers are paid wages precisely because they do not own the means of production and therefore have to sell their labor power. The interests of the working class and the bourgeoisie are opposed to each other and cannot be reconciled: While the capitalists strive for the highest possible rate of profit and must therefore keep the workers' wages as low as possible as a matter of principle, the workers are dependent on the highest possible wage because they have to earn a living with it.

In reality, the level of wages is by no means based on "performance", as bourgeois ideologues still claim today, but is determined by economic development and the class struggle. While wages usually rise in phases of upswing because the supply of labor becomes scarcer and thus the fighting power of organized workers increases, competition among workers intensifies in phases of crisis with high unemployment and they are more willing to accept a job for little money. Basically, the better organized the working class is, the more resolutely and consistently

they represent the interests of the class in their organizations (trade unions and communist parties), the better their working conditions and wages will be.

4.9.2 Landowners and petty bourgeoisie

The existence of classes was not first discovered by Marx, but already by classical political economists, in particular Ricardo. Like the classical economists, Marx assumed the existence of a third fundamental class alongside workers and capitalists, namely landowners. Under capitalism, they receive a land rent solely for owning the land and either using it themselves to run a capitalist business or renting or leasing it out to grow crops, extract raw materials from the land or build and rent out residential buildings. However, landowners play a subordinate role in understanding the laws of capitalism. As a rule, today they are also capitalists, i.e. they do not play a role as an independent class. In the third volume of "Das Kapital", Marx examines the laws according to which the amount of land rent is determined. For reasons of space, however, we will not discuss these here.

Between capital and the working class stands the petty bourgeoisie. In the narrower sense, the petty bourgeoisie includes small proprietors who own their own business on the basis of ownership of the means of production, but who exploit no or very few workers. Even if they employ a small number of workers, they cannot live off the profits of their business and have to work in it themselves. They therefore belong neither to the capitalist class nor to the working class, but form a separate group. The petty bourgeoisie in cities consists, for example, of small traders, craftsmen, restaurant owners or registered doctors with their own practices. The rural petty bourgeoisie are farmers who have their own small farm on which they work. With the development of capitalism, the petty bourgeoisie did not disappear, but it became ever smaller and economically less important. At the beginning of the 20th century, for example, a large proportion of German society still belonged to the peasantry, but today this proportion is vanishingly small. Small tradespeople in the cities are also increasingly being squeezed out by the large monopolies, e.g. small stores by the large retail chains and crafts by industry, or they are dependent on loans from the banks, which often de facto own the means of production.

Due to its position between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie is a politically fluctuating class. It is constantly threatened in its existence by capitalist enterprises and especially the monopolies. If the petty bourgeois fails with his business and goes bankrupt, he inevitably slips into the working class. At the same time, however, he is also an owner, can cherish the (in the vast majority of cases futile) hope of joining the bourgeoisie and is therefore susceptible to the anti-communist propaganda of the ruling class, as he fears the loss of his property through a socialist revolution. This intermediate position makes the petty bourgeoisie a social group that can be won over as an ally by both reaction and the labor movement. An example of the former is fascism, which historically relied

primarily on the petty bourgeoisie. An example of a successful alliance with the proletariat is the October Revolution in Russia, in which the peasantry played an important revolutionary role.

4.9.3 Strata and factions of the bourgeoisie

The classes are also not homogeneous. On the one hand, the capitalists have common interests in the most effective exploitation of the working class, the maintenance of the capitalist system as a whole, and so on. On the other hand, however, there are also conflicting interests of different groups of capital, which arise, for example, from the position of capital in the capital cycle: just as capital first exists in the form of money in the production of surplus value, then transforms itself into productive capital and finally realizes its value as commodities on the market, there are parts of capital that specialize in one of these sections. Fictitious capital is money capital per se, which is never transformed into productive capital, but only ever yields interest as money. Productive capital includes industrial capitalists, but also other branches of surplus value production (e.g. capitalistically organized agriculture, private hospitals, etc.). Finally, merchant capitalists specialize in the realization of commodity capital. They do not produce themselves, but appropriate part of the surplus value by buying and selling goods. For each of these three groups, certain interests arise solely from their economic function: e.g. banks have an interest in high interest rates, whereas industrial capitalists have an interest in low interest rates so that they can borrow cheaply. These different groups of capital, which have certain common interests due to their economic structure and function in the overall capitalist system and therefore come into conflict with each other, are also referred to as capital fractions. The merging of the various groups in finance capital, which leads to some capitalists combining all three functions under one roof, conversely also results in a tendency to unify the interests of the various factions. The extent to which one can nevertheless speak of capital factions, how serious the lines of division between them are and what effects they have on politics is a question that needs to be researched and clarified.

In monopoly capitalism, a further central line of division within capital inevitably runs between monopolistic capital, which realizes increased monopoly profits, and non-monopolistic capital, at whose expense these monopoly profits are made.

However, the level of the organic composition of capital, the degree of internationalization (e.g. orientation towards exports or the domestic market) and other factors can also lead to different interests and strategies of capital fractions. These contradictions within capital mean that there must be opportunities for balancing interests between the various factions. This role is played by the bourgeois parties, among others, which usually express the interests of different capital factions. The conflicts of interest between the monopoly capital of different countries are often

particularly sharp and lead to political conflicts between states, which are also fought out as wars.

4.9.4 Strata of the working class

The working class also comprises different strata, depending on where these groups of people stand in the production process. The more advanced the capitalist development of a country and the higher the country is in the international imperialist hierarchy, the larger the privileged, better-paid and more secure sections of the class, the labor aristocracy, tend to be and the greater their modest prosperity. However, capitalist development with its crises also means that this labor aristocracy is constantly being eroded and potentially losing its ability to continue to bind workers politically to the system.

In the poorer layers of the working class, loyalty to the state and approval of capitalism is much less pronounced. This does not mean that these workers will automatically become revolutionaries, but on average they are much more skeptical of the ruling political system and have less hope in capitalism. The poorest layers of the working class partly overlap with the industrial reserve army, which capitalism constantly produces and catapults out of the labor process, sometimes in larger numbers (in times of crisis), sometimes in smaller numbers (in upswings). For some of these most oppressed and poorest strata of the class, capitalism leads to such strong signs of impoverishment and brutalization (crime, drug, alcohol or gambling addiction, violence, etc.) that they can hardly be organized by the workers' movement. The low class consciousness and the moral brutalization of these sections of the class make them a preferred starting point for state repressive organs to use against the labour movement, but also for fascists and other reactionaries.

Working questions

- **What is the class contradiction between labor and capital?**
- **What is the petty bourgeoisie?**
- **Why do different sections of the bourgeoisie have different or even conflicting interests?**

Discussion questions

- **Do senior and executive employees or civil servants belong to the working class?**
- **How much weight should be given to the attempt to win over the petty bourgeoisie as an ally in the class struggle? Are there also dangers involved?**

"New Marx reading" and "Monetary Theory of Value"

The "new reading of Marx" has its roots in the 1960s (e.g. Helmut Reichelt), but has played an increasingly important role since the 1990s, especially in academic studies of Marx. Michael Heinrich, with his "monetary theory of value", can today be regarded as a "standard work" due to his "Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. An Introduction" (Heinrich 2007) can be considered the best-known representative. Heinrich rejects Marx and Engels' view that "Das Kapital" represents both a historical and a logical development. For him, as for other representatives of the "new Marx reading" (but also, for example, the Gegenstandpunkt), Marx's analysis is a pure conceptual development of logical categories without reference to historical development. This means that capitalism is not understood as a historically developing social formation, but that the analysis of capitalism merely has to describe the "ideal average" of the mode of production. In contrast to Marx, who with this expression merely meant that the analysis of the mode of production must disregard particularities, Heinrich means that historical developmental tendencies and stages in the development of capitalism must be completely rejected.

On this basis, Heinrich rejects both the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and Lenin's theory of imperialism. A historical tendency for the rate of profit to fall cannot be substantiated. It follows that an intensification of capitalist class antagonisms cannot be proven either. Crises did not lead to an intensification of contradictions, but only served to eliminate imbalances by force. Lenin's analysis of monopoly capitalism is rejected because it supposedly only considers the will of the monopoly masters and no longer the law of value. In reality, however, the Marxist theory of imperialism in no way rejects the workings of the law of value, but analyzes how monopolies are formed out of it, changing its effects.

Heinrich not only rejects the developmental idea of the critique of political economy, but also the dialectical method in principle. This was "a kind of miracle weapon with which one could explain everything and anything" (Heinrich 2007, p. 35).

This is of course not correct, because dialectics as a scientific method cannot be applied arbitrarily, but merely reflects the actual dialectical development of reality.

Heinrich's "monetary theory of value" rejects Marx's view that the value of commodities, i.e. the work objectified in them under capitalist conditions, determines exchange values and prices. Instead, value is only formed when the commodities are sold and can therefore only be represented in money. However, Heinrich's theory is no longer

a labor theory of value at all. For Marx was concerned with explaining the exchange relations, i.e. the level of prices, through value as socially necessary labor time. If, as Heinrich claims, value were simply the same as the market price realized on the market, nothing could be explained by labor time. Value would then simply be what emerges on the market through supply and demand. Despite pseudo-Marxist phrases, Heinrich and the "monetary value theorists" ultimately defend exactly the same point of view as David Ricardo's liberal economic theory, which considers supply and demand to be a sufficient explanation of prices and rejects the labor theory of value.

5 The bourgeois-capitalist state

The bourgeois state plays a central role in politics and in the class struggle. We encounter it as the author of the laws that affect our lives; in the form of the school system, which educates us and our children and tries to plant the ideology of the ruling class in their heads; as the employment office, which we are forced to deal with if we cannot find a job on the capitalist labor market; in the form of the military, which sends the sons (and increasingly also daughters) of the working class to kill and die in other countries; or as the police, who beat up demonstrations. Anyone who wants to overcome capitalism must fundamentally address the question of the state. What is the character of the existing state and what does this mean for revolutionary strategy and tactics?

First of all, what is a state in general and how did states come about? States have not always existed. On the contrary, for the longest time mankind has lived in small, scattered communities that were not organized as states. However, with the development of the division of society into classes, i.e. into exploiters and exploited, mechanisms for maintaining the relationship between the classes also developed. In particular, the question of violence arose, because an exploitative relationship is a violent relationship—it is based on the fact that some people concentrate the majority of society's wealth within themselves, while the majority produce it but have no access to it. This exclusion of the majority from the fruits of their labor, the condemnation of this majority to poverty and hardship, cannot be maintained without violence. „*Such a society could only exist either in the perpetual open struggle of these classes against each other or under the rule of a third power, which, apparently (!) above standing between the opposing classes, suppressed their open conflict and allowed the class struggle to be fought out at most in the economic sphere, in so-called legal form*", writes Engels on the historical emergence

of the state (Engels: Origin of the Family, etc., MEW 21, p. 164). This created the need for an institution „*which not only perpetuated the emerging division of society into classes, but also the right of the propertied class to exploit the non-propertied class and to rule over them. And this institution came. The state was invented*" (ibid., p. 105f). Engels is only writing here about the state in class societies, in which there are exploiters and exploited, and not about the socialist state. It is also important to note at this point that, according to Engels, the state only appears to be above the classes: The ruling exploiting class is always at pains to maintain the illusion that the state is a neutral mechanism that only exists for the common good. It tries to conceal the fact that the state itself has a class character, that it enforces the rule of a particular class.

Of course, this also applies to the bourgeois-capitalist state. Just as the European states in the age of feudalism were states of the feudal nobility, the bourgeois state is a state of capital. While in past centuries there were also states in which several classes shared rule, with the development of capitalism the bourgeoisie has increasingly asserted itself as the sole ruling class and absorbed or marginalized other exploiting classes such as the large landowners.

5.1 The class character of the bourgeois state

This class character of the bourgeois state consists firstly in the fact that the state in a class society is a „*machine for keeping down the oppressed, exploited class*" (ibid., p. 170f). The state has developed a variety of mechanisms to prevent the working class from becoming aware of its situation, organizing itself and taking power. These include repressive apparatuses such as the police, secret services and army, as well as means of manipulating and influencing consciousness such as schools, the media, etc. But more on this later. But more on this later.

Secondly, the bourgeois state is defined as the state of capital by the fact that, as the „*ideal total capitalist*" (Engels: Anti-Dühring, MEW 20, p. 260), it stands above the competing interests of the individual capitalists and represents the overall interests of the capitalist class in its national territory. As has already been shown, the capitalists represent different, sometimes conflicting interests, on the basis of which they can be divided into different factions. However, the capitalist state cannot represent the interests of just one faction or one individual capitalist. If it did, it could no longer fulfill its function of ensuring the reproduction of capital as a whole. For then its entire activity, from legislation, the development of infrastructure and foreign trade policy to the fight against the revolutionary workers' movement, would only be subject to the interests of a certain section of capital, while the requirements of all other groups of capital would be disregarded. But this is not possible. For the bourgeois state is dependent in its entire existence on the success of capital accumulation. For in order to „*maintain public power, contributions from citizens are necessary—***taxes***. (...) With advancing civilization, they are no longer enough; the state draws bills of exchange on the future, makes loans,*

national debts" (Engels: The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, MEW 21, p. 166). Both tax revenues and thus ultimately the creditworthiness of the state depend on the accumulation of capital. It is therefore part of the nature of the bourgeois state that it supports the accumulation of its national capital by all means: It enacts necessary laws, rules and norms that define the framework of capitalist business. It protects private property through laws and the police. It provides infrastructure for capitalist enterprises, such as roads, railways, electricity, water, etc. It takes on long-term major investments itself or promotes them where individual capitalists cannot or do not want to raise the necessary capital. It organizes education in schools and universities, and in doing so produces both well-trained and untrained workers, both of whom are necessary for capital. In crisis situations, it guarantees the solvency of banks and companies, if necessary by absorbing the losses of private capitalists and passing them on to the working class. The wealth produced by society is redistributed via the state budget, with all classes being taxed in different ways and also benefiting from state spending in very different ways. For example, the working class has part of its wages taken away through taxes in order to finance expenditure in the interests of the ruling class. Conversely, expenditure on social security or health care for workers is generally not financed from the income of the capitalists, but from that of the working class itself, so that the so-called „welfare state" under capitalism essentially represents a redistribution of income within the working class.

The state also fights class-struggle forces in the labor movement and tries to either crush the labor movement as such or integrate it into the capitalist system as a harmless support so that production processes are not interrupted by strikes. It does all this in order to create the best possible conditions for its own capitalists in the competition against the capital of other countries.

Thirdly, the bourgeois state is also the place where the bourgeoisie organizes itself politically. Due to the competition and conflicting interests between the various groups of the bourgeoisie, the capitalists are not a unified bloc with a unified policy. Nevertheless, in order to establish their rule in order to maintain their rights and ensure that the bourgeois state acts in their interests, they must organize themselves politically as a class. Basically in the same way that the working class has to organize itself in order to assert its interests collectively. The difference, however, is that the capitalists have the state with all its apparatuses at their disposal. The bourgeoisie organizes itself in employers' and business associations, in lobby organizations, in political parties, in „business-related" institutes and think tanks, but also in the direct state apparatuses: In parliament, the government, ministries and their „advisory" groups, the central bank, etc.

These apparatuses have different essential functions for the bourgeoisie: They act as platforms for the individual factions of capital to express their respective views and help them assert themselves; They serve the bourgeoisie to develop a strategy that the state can enforce despite their internal differences; They serve to propagate the interests of the bourgeoisie in the most direct form possible as

the „common good"; And they enable the various capital factions and individual capitals to try to assert their special interests as a matter of priority. For even if it is part of the nature of the capitalist state that it is oriented towards the interests of capital as a whole, there are at the same time countless opportunities for individual capitalists to assert their special interests against other capitalists. This is done by legally influencing individual politicians, sending representatives to „expert committees" of the parliaments, but also through bribery and similar processes. The bourgeoisie is linked to the state apparatus in a variety of ways, through personal and institutional connections, is integrated into it and there is mutual dependence. Through these connections, state personnel are selected and the interests of capital are translated into a political program and ultimately into concrete political measures.

The bourgeois state is therefore anything but a neutral agency that merely regulates and maintains the system, but is the bourgeoisie's instrument of power. Its apparatuses serve the capitalists to enforce their interests against foreign competitors and against the forces of the working class. They are used by the representatives of the bourgeoisie for this purpose and adapted to it. However, the fact that the state is an instrument of power of the capitalist class must not be misinterpreted: It has often been taken to mean that the state was in itself a neutral tool, adopted only by the capitalists. This would mean that the working class or other forces could also take over the state. A revolution and the destruction of the bourgeois state would then no longer be necessary; instead, the working class could fight for changes within the state institutions, gain positions of power and key positions within them and thus ultimately introduce socialism step by step.

But of course this is not possible. Because the bourgeois state and all its apparatuses have a class character, they carry the „DNA of the bourgeoisie" within them, so to speak. They were created by the bourgeoisie (which is also how bourgeois states came into being historically) in order to enforce their rule. The laws and the legal system are not neutral, but are designed in every respect to guarantee capitalist private property and the functioning of capitalist society. Parliament does not and cannot function as an organ of the „will of the people". Its whole mode of operation is based on the involvement of representatives of capital in legislation and the parties themselves do not serve the masses as self-organization, but as mechanisms for recruiting new personnel for the administration of the capitalist state. The secret services, the courts and the police also serve to combat the political organizations of the working class. A multitude of instruments thus prevent the working class and its party from taking over the government by legal, constitutional means.

The bourgeois state cannot openly admit its character as the state of the bourgeoisie, as the state of a minority, because then the vast majority of people would turn away from it. Capitalism can only continue to exist if the majority of people do not understand how it functions and the character of the state. With a socialist state, however, it is exactly the opposite: it relies on the broad participation of the

masses and openly propagates its character as a state of the working class. Lenin writes „*that the bourgeois state, which exercises the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie by means of the democratic republic, admit before the people that it serves the bourgeoisie; it cannot tell the truth, it is forced to dissemble. But a state of the commune type, the Soviet state, tells the people the* ***truth*** *openly and frankly and declares to them that it is the dictatorship of the proletariat and the poor peasantry*" (Lenin: The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky, LW 28, p. 303).

It is therefore no coincidence that the question of the class character of the bourgeois state was often controversial in the workers' movement and that various misconceptions arose time and again. Lenin had an extensive debate with the German social democrat Karl Kautsky on this issue. The latter used the terms „democracy" and „dictatorship" in a class-neutral way, as if bourgeois democracy were not also a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Lenin countered this by saying that when talking about democracy, a Marxist would always ask „For which class?" (ibid., p. 233). For just as bourgeois democracy a dictatorship over the working people, proletarian democracy is a dictatorship over the bourgeoisie. Kautsky also drew the conclusion from his analysis of the state that a revolution, the destruction of the state and the establishment of a state of the working class were superfluous. This historical debate is still relevant today—because it shows how much the strategy of the workers' movement on a correct analysis of the state.

5.2 Bourgeois democracy

Civil democracy emphasizes the principle of the „separation of powers". It claims that this guarantees the mutual control of legislative, judicial and executive powers and prevents the abuse of power. In reality, there can be no strict separation of powers even under capitalism. For despite its many internal contradictions, the state is a unified state and it is the state of the bourgeoisie. Its various departments are not independent of each other, but part of the same coherent mechanism. The various apparatuses are united by their common characteristic that they all express and enforce the political rule of the bourgeoisie. All powers therefore serve capital and in practice the formal separation between them is often enough transcended or completely abolished (in the transition to open dictatorship) when the class struggle makes it necessary for the ruling class. Real democracy, i.e. participation of the masses in rule, is not guaranteed by the „separation of powers". However, what is called the separation of powers in capitalism is not irrelevant. In fact, there is a certain degree of mutual control between the state apparatuses in the sense that strict attention is paid to ensuring that the framework of the capitalist system is not abandoned. Even in the unlikely event that the Communist Party were to win a majority in parliament through elections, there would still be the courts, which could declare progressive reforms „unconstitutional", and the army and other repressive apparatuses, which could dissolve parliament without further ado and remove a working class government. In this way, the „separation

of powers" serves on the one hand to ideologically conceal the dictatorship of capital, but on the other hand also to better defend this dictatorship and strengthen its defensive forces against the working class.

Bourgeois democracy is based on the principle of party pluralism, i.e. the existence of several parties that compete with each other and take turns in managing the affairs of government. Under capitalism, this principle is useful for the bourgeoisie. On the one hand, because it reinforces the illusion that the people really have something to decide in elections, that they can choose between different alternatives. On the other hand, because the different parties with their different programs also develop different political strategies for capital, which are useful depending on the situation and can be flexibly applied, combined and exchanged for one another. Often, but not always, this also expresses the interests of different groups of the ruling class, which thus have a regulated institutional mechanism to resolve their contradictions with each other. This is why such bourgeois multi-party systems have prevailed in one form or another in most capitalist countries.

The fundamental characteristics of the bourgeois state, which constitute its class character, also apply without restriction to bourgeois „democracy". Even if „democracy" actually means the rule of the people, the bourgeois-democratic state is anything but the rule of the people. On the contrary, it is a variant of the rule of a small minority, namely the bourgeoisie. Lenin wrote about bourgeois democracy in Germany: „*The present ‚freedom of assembly and of the press' in the ‚democratic' (bourgeois-democratic) German republic is a lie and a deception, for* ***in reality*** *it means* ***freedom for the rich*** *to buy and corrupt the press,* ***freedom for the rich*** *to make the people drunk with the booze of bourgeois newspaper lies,* ***freedom for the rich*** *to keep the mansions, the best buildings, etc., as their ‚property'. as their ‚property' firmly in its hands.*" (Lenin: On Democracy and Dictatorship, LW 28, p. 377). For: „*If one looks more closely at the mechanism of capitalist democracy, one finds everywhere, both in the ‚minor', supposedly minor, details of electoral law (...) and in the technique of representative bodies, in the actual obstructions to the right of assembly (...) or in the purely capitalist organization of the daily press, and so on and so forth—everywhere one looks, restrictions on restrictions of democratism. These restrictions, exceptions, exclusions and hindrances to the poor seem slight, especially to those who have never known hardship themselves and have never come into contact with the life of the oppressed classes in their mass (...) - but taken together these restrictions have the effect of excluding the poor population from politics, from active participation in democracy, of forcing them out.*" (Lenin: State and Revolution, LW 25, p. 474).

This means that even if there are formal democratic institutions (elections are held, there is official freedom of expression and assembly, etc.), these do not call the rule of capital into question. Moreover, it is also a dangerous illusion that bourgeois democracy is not tyranny. For what applies to every state, that it is an apparatus of violence used by people to rule over other people, naturally also

applies to bourgeois democracy. Here, too, the police and secret services take action against opponents of the system, and here, too, censorship and party bans are always a possibility. In West Germany, for example, this was demonstrated by the ban on the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in 1956, in which the government and the courts broke their own laws in many ways and also easily undermined the „separation of powers" in order to ban the KPD and throw many communists in prison once again (after the bitter experiences of fascism).

Does this mean that there is no difference between bourgeois democracy and forms of open dictatorship of the bourgeoisie? No. Lenin also emphasized: „*You must take advantage of bourgeois democracy, for compared with feudalism it is a tremendous historical advance, but do not forget for a moment the bourgeois character of this ‚democracy', (...) that even in the most democratic republic, no less than in the monarchy, the state is nothing as a machine for the oppression of one class by another*" (Lenin: On Democracy and Dictatorship, LW 28, p. 376f). It makes a difference whether the working class is allowed to organize itself to a certain extent in parties and independent trade unions and can publish legal newspapers, or whether every workers' organization is immediately banned and smashed. There is a difference between communists merely losing their jobs for their views and being thrown into concentration camps or murdered in the streets, as under fascism. Bourgeois democratic rights are limited in many respects and can also be completely abolished by the ruling class. Nevertheless, they are achievements for which the working class has fought hard and which it must defend against all attacks. Conversely, this in no way means that the working class should defend bourgeois democracy itself, i.e. the capitalist state. This mistake has often been made by communists in the past. The task of the working class, however, remains the struggle against this state and the overthrow of capitalist rule.

5.3 Fascism

Fascism is another variant of the rule of capital. In contrast to bourgeois democracy, it permanently uses openly terrorist methods to destroy the workers' movement. Bourgeois ideologues try to disguise the character of fascism as a capitalist form of rule that can also merge relatively smoothly into bourgeois democracy and emerge from it again. For example, they put forward theories according to which historical fascism (e.g. the Nazis in Germany, the fascists in Italy, etc.) was a movement of the masses or even of the working class. In doing so, they exploit the fact that the fascists often gave themselves a working-class-friendly veneer for reasons of mass manipulation (e.g. the NSDAP's branding as „national socialist" and „workers' party"). However, this has absolutely nothing to do with reality. It is a fact that the Nazi Party was massively supported by capital and that Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor was mainly due to the fact that leading circles from industry and banks urged Reich President Hindenburg to do so. Mussolini in Italy was also brought to power by an alliance of landowners, capitalists and the church. The transfer of power to fascism took place in a similar

way in other countries. Overall, it can be said that power was always transferred to fascist forces when the ruling class no longer the methods and ways of bourgeois democracy to be sufficient to achieve its goals. Thus there were ever stronger forces in German monopoly capital that advocated even more brutal action against the workers' movement, an armament program and imperialist wars of conquest. Only Hitler and his fascist movement could achieve all this for them. If we compare bourgeois democracy and open dictatorships such as fascism, we see that they differ above all in their methods of rule. An openly terrorist dictatorship of capital relies heavily on the bloody repression of its opponents, i.e. the revolutionary workers' movement, but also other opponents (e.g. bourgeois liberals and social democrats, ethnic or religious minorities, etc.). This means that repressive apparatuses such as the army, secret services, political police, prisons and concentration camps etc. play a greater role. In bourgeois-democratic states, the working class is more likely to be persuaded to agree to capitalist rule, or at least to accept it, through concessions or sham concessions and ideological influence. According to Lenin, „*the bourgeoisie in all countries inevitably two systems of government, two methods of fighting for its interests and for the defense of its rule, whereby these two methods sometimes replace each other, sometimes intertwine with each other in various combinations. The first method is the method of violence, the method of refusing to make any concessions to the labor movement, the method of maintaining all old and outlived institutions, the method of intransigent rejection of reforms. (...) The second method is the method of „liberalism", of steps in the direction of the development of political rights, in the direction of reforms, concessions, etc.*" (Lenin: The Differences in the European Labor Movement, LW 16, p. 356). Nevertheless, in the „democratic" states there is also direct repression, just as in open dictatorships there are also non-violent methods of rule, e.g. state propaganda, the education system, etc. However, as Lenin emphasizes, the transition between the different forms of rule does not simply depend on the will of the rulers, but is also influenced by the development of capitalism and its contradictions. In most cases, for example, it was during deep crises in the capitalist system that the bourgeoisie decided to switch to fascism.

5.4 The state in the imperialist age

The state is part of the superstructure of a society. Its development is therefore always determined by the economic laws of the prevailing mode of production. If the mode of production changes, sooner or later the state must also change its form and adapt to the new social conditions—if the change in the form of the state is not even the prerequisite for a social upheaval, as is the case with the socialist revolution. The state also changes within a mode of production as social and economic structures develop. In capitalism, this is particularly significant for the transition from capitalism of free competition to monopoly capitalism.

Under monopoly capitalism, the state becomes an imperialist state. It retains all the characteristics listed above. It is therefore still the state of the bourgeoisie. And yet there are fundamental changes. For the monopolies develop a close relationship with the imperialist state. This close relationship becomes indispensable in monopoly capitalism in order to continue to guarantee the utilization of capital. As has already been shown, the production process in modern capitalism requires ever more gigantic amounts of constant and above all fixed capital (i.e. above all machines and technology). Many branches of production can only be profitably organized on a large scale, with tens of thousands of workers. This huge scale of production requires regulation and often direct intervention by the state, which promotes the accumulation of its monopolies through various measures such as state investment, subsidies, technology policy, export promotion, etc. The increasing crises and the resulting social contradictions in monopoly capitalism also necessitate a close relationship between the state and monopolies. Even if the state continues to be the ideal total capitalist, i.e. enforces the utilization of total capital, the monopolies play a special role in this. They are much more closely networked with the decisive state apparatuses than non-monopolistic capital and try to propagate their views in society through various channels (mass media, foundations, etc.). Crises in particular also show that the fate of major banks and industrial monopolies is of paramount importance for the accumulation of capital in a country and that the state will therefore generally mobilize large financial resources to save these monopolies from bankruptcy. The role of the state is also changing in foreign policy: because monopoly capital's urge to expand internationally and export capital is increasing, the role of the imperialist state as the international representative of the interests of its monopoly capital is also gaining in importance. Even if these methods are by no means new, the imperialist state is increasingly using methods of blackmail, sanctions and embargoes, interventions and wars to enforce the most favorable conditions for its own capital everywhere.

Working questions

- **Why are there states in all class societies?**
- **What does the statement that the bourgeois state is an „ideal total capitalist" mean?**
- **What are the differences between bourgeois democracy and fascism?**

Discussion questions

- **According to Marxism, the bourgeois state is an instrument of capital. Is this perhaps an exaggerated view?**
- **Is it true that bourgeois democracy is also a state of capital and violent rule?**

- **Should communists defend bourgeois democracy in the face of the threat of fascism?**
- **Is the imperialist state really still an „ideal total capitalist“ or is it becoming a mere instrument of monopoly capital?**

6 Revolutionary strategy and socialist revolution

You can only change the world if you understand it. Those who do not understand the laws of capitalist society do not know what the content of social change must be; they also do not know which class is capable of overthrowing capitalism and how communists must organize themselves in order to work towards revolution. The necessity of the socialist revolution and the conditions that must be met for it to become a real possibility only emerge from scientific analysis—not just analysis at the desk, but also the constant generalization of the experiences of the workers' movement.

Theory and practice can therefore not be separate areas, but must be closely connected, provide each other with material, point each other in the right direction and fertilize each other. Theoretical insights only emerge from man's practical relationship to the world. Just as it was the labor process drove people's practical interest in the questions of natural science, it was the experiences of the class struggle that made Marx, Engels and Lenin aware of the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist mode of production and the necessity of overcoming them. Only then did the fundamental laws of movement become recognizable. For the bourgeois economists Smith and Ricardo or other theorists who analyzed capitalism, this path was blocked precisely by the fact that they assumed from the outset that capitalism was a „natural", eternally valid order.

Socialism and communism as a perspective do not simply emerge from the analysis as the only sensible alternative to capitalism. Rather, it is the development of capitalism itself that ever more clearly socialism as the next historical step. The

degree of socialization of production that has been achieved, the ever-increasing centralization of control over capital, the development of productive forces that are no longer rationally applicable under conditions of private ownership of the means of production and therefore require constant state intervention, as well as productive forces (such as today's information and communication technologies), which immensely facilitate and suggest the central planning of the entire production—all this leads us to the conclusion that today's productive forces have long since ceased to fit the relations of production, that socialism is a real possibility and the only way to organize social development in harmony with the needs of the people.

6.1 Reform and revolution

Since the beginnings of the labor movement, there have been disputes about its political perspective. These debates continue to this day. The central question that has always been at stake is the relationship between the movement and state power. Is it possible for a government to transform capitalism through reforms in the interests of the working class to such an extent that it loses its ugly aspects? Can capitalism even be completely overcome through reforms? Or are the numerous horrifying manifestations of this system rather an expression of fundamental contradictions that can only be resolved by a revolution, a smashing of the bourgeois state and the establishment of a new rule of the working class?

6.1.1 Reformists and revolutionaries

Those who do not such a revolution necessary, either because they believe that a humane society is possible even under capitalist conditions or because they believe that socialism can also be achieved through gradual reforms, are referred to as reformists. On the other side are the revolutionaries who want to overthrow the bourgeois state and replace it with a proletarian one.

Marxists fundamentally represent a revolutionary position and fight reformism as a harmful illusion. The essence of capitalist society is the appropriation of surplus value and the accumulation of capital. Capitalism therefore essentially means that workers are exploited so that the small minority of capitalists can enrich themselves. The aim of capitalist production is to turn invested money into more money so that it can be reinvested to become more money. Since human needs play no role in this process, capitalist production can only develop „*by undermining at the same time the sources of all wealth: the earth and the worker.*" (Marx: Capital Volume I, MEW 23, p. 530), i.e. destroying man and nature. Because capitalism is fundamentally opposed to the goal of a good life, in which needs are the meaning and purpose of production, it cannot be transformed into a humane society through reforms. Every reform that improves the situation of the working class a little must be fought for against the resistance of capital. If a reform restricts the profits of capital, as higher wages, better developed social systems, a free public

health system and laws against air pollution or harmful production conditions do, capital will try to roll back these achievements at the first opportunity. What's more, at a certain point, wage increases or higher taxes can push the rate of profit of capital down so far that capitalists no longer invest, thus accelerating the development of the crisis, which is inevitable anyway. In the crisis, however, many workers will lose their jobs, which will weaken the organizational power of the working class and enable capital to push back workers' achievements. This shows that reforms that improve the lives of workers are possible under capitalism, but they are not permanent and cannot solve the fundamental problems.

The idea of some rather „left-wing" reformists that capitalism should be abolished, but that this goal can also be achieved step by step through reform, is also a very dangerous error. The bourgeois state is the institutionalized form of the rule of capital, secured by force. It is therefore not possible for this state, or even just parts of it, to taken over by the working class. A communist party that attempts to do so, i.e. that enters a government within the framework of the bourgeois state, will in fact only co-administer capitalism. It must keep „the economy", i.e. the accumulation of capital, running and can therefore only enforce very limited concessions to the working class. Moreover, as soon as it really attacks the interests of capital, it will provoke fierce resistance from the ruling class. Because leading the government is by no means the same as power in your hands. Even if a communist party rules the country, under capitalist conditions the real power will still be in the hands of the bourgeoisie and it will still have strong positions in the state apparatus (e.g. in the army, the police, the secret services, the bourgeois parties, the media, the courts, etc.), which will make it impossible for the forces of the working class and the people to legally disempower and push back capital. Because the laws, even in bourgeois „democracies", are laws capital and in no way serve to abolish capitalism.

6.1.2 The harmful consequences of reformism

By rejecting the struggle for socialist revolution, a reformist movement in fact also rejects the struggle for socialism. It becomes a force that adjusts itself to co-governing capitalism and only wants to improve it instead of abolishing it. However, a force that wants to manage capitalism must orient its policies to the requirements of capital accumulation; in the long term, it cannot pursue policies against capital. This also includes passing capital-friendly laws at the expense of the working class, leading the workers into wars against other peoples and suppressing the revolutionary workers' movement by force. It is the inner logic of reformism that it is based on a supposedly „left", „progressive" position developed into a system-supporting and ultimately openly reactionary position. The history of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), which was initially a revolutionary workers' party, then became increasingly ambiguous on the question of reform and revolution, agreed to the slaughter of the imperialist First World War in 1914 and called for the massacre of workers in other countries, only to become

the butcher of the revolutionary workers in Germany in 1918/19, is a single illustration of this logical development.

Reformism in its various forms is based on illusions. It feeds the false idea among workers and the petty-bourgeois classes that it is possible to solve problems through elections, legislative changes, a purely trade union struggle or demonstrations and protests alone, but in any case without the revolutionary seizure of power by the working class and the masses. The people who are subject to the ideological influence of reformism are repeatedly led into political dead ends in which their hopes and dreams are disappointed every time. Ultimately, the consequence of reformism is always that workers turn away from the path of organization, class struggle and belief in the possibility of a better world. Either they are won over to capitalism with limited concessions and integrated into the system. Or they realize that reformism has betrayed them, whereupon they usually do not turn to revolutionary organizations, but resign in despair, accept the unacceptable conditions or turn to reactionary, anti-working-class forces that entice them with other illusory solutions, which ultimately always come at the expense of the workers. Because reformism has this effect of disorganizing and demoralizing the working class and keeping it from taking the road to liberation, communists are irreconcilable enemies of reformism. The parties and organizations that spread reformist ideas must be isolated in the working class, and their true character and harmful role must be exposed to the workers.

It is therefore generally wrong for these forces to be accepted as „allies" of the communists. The misleading appeals for „unity of the left", which are often heard even from honest people who want to stand up for the cause of the working class, are based on the false idea that revolutionaries and reformists are somehow on the same side and that at least part of the road can be traveled together. However, we make a distinction between the supporters and members of the reformist parties, who are of course not our enemies but with whom we want to fight together, and the leaderships of these parties. The leaderships of the reformist parties do not represent the interests of the working class, but try to channel their struggle and protest into channels that are harmless to the system. They contribute to pitting different layers of the class against each other and thus stand in opposition to the unity of the working class. The struggle for unity of action, including with workers influenced by social democracy, is therefore always simultaneously a struggle to detach these workers from their leaders and to expose the reformist leaders as opponents in the class struggle.

6.1.3 Communists and the struggle for reform

Does mean that communists would reject the fight for reforms? That they generally do not take part in parliamentary elections and also do not fight for better wages and working conditions in companies and trade unions? No, quite the opposite. The struggle for reforms is necessary for communists because the work-

ing class and other oppressed sections of the people (e.g. small farmers, small self-employed people) are only united through the struggle, only through this do they gain the necessary experience of struggle, experience the solidarity of the whole class and begin to experience themselves as a class, as a collective, common force that can really change the world.

The communists therefore not only do not reject the struggle for reforms, but it is they who fight most consistently for every improvement, however small, in the interests of the working class and broad masses of the people. In every wage struggle, every fight for a longer break at work or measures to protect the health of workers, in every demand for better maternity protection, adequate funding for hospitals and schools or more co-determination, the communists must take the lead and consistently represent the interests of the working class. In doing so, they always start from the interests of the class as a whole, i.e. they reject demands that cause division in the working class and only benefit certain sections at the expense of others. At the same time, they also reject demands that lead to illusions among the workers. For example, demands that cannot be implemented within capitalism and require socialism must not be made in such a way that the workers draw false political conclusions from them. In this case, the reform struggle does not lead to a positive development of consciousness, but rather blocks the emergence of revolutionary class consciousness.

So why don't we seek an alliance with reformist forces in the fight for reforms, who also put forward some of our demands? The problem is that the reformists are pursuing a completely different goal. If they lead a struggle at all, instead of simply leaving the fulfillment of their demands to parliament or the negotiations of the trade union leaders with capital, as is so often the case, their struggle is limited to reformism from the outset. The decisive factor of the struggle is not the struggle itself, but the extent to which it contributes to the working class organizing and uniting itself and thereby gaining an awareness of its own situation and the necessity of fighting for the revolution. But it is precisely this development that the reformists are sabotaging and obstructing wherever they can. They do not want an independent workers' movement that acts in its own interests, but a workers' movement that is subordinate to the state and the reformist parties, that is satisfied with compromise solutions and follows illusions. And while at one point they put forward demands that would lead to an improvement in the situation of the workers, at many other points they agree to political decisions that harm the working class. It therefore remains the case that the communists must fight and expose the reformist forces.

A completely different question, however, is how communists deal with the masses who follow the reformist illusions and support the social democratic parties. These people are, of course, not opponents, but on the contrary, the interlocutors of communist politics. The communists strive for the unity of the working class. This does not mean that all parties and organizations in which workers are organized should unite without principle. But it does mean that in the struggle

for a better life as many sections of the class as possible must stand side by side, regardless of their political inclinations and affiliations. That is why we support united trade unions and mass organizations that do not divide the working class, but contribute to its unification across political boundaries, across differences in gender and origin, but also across sectors and companies.

Working questions

- **Why can't capitalism be transformed into a people-friendly society through reforms?**
- **What is the relationship between communists and struggles for reform?**

Discussion questions

- **Shouldn't communists at least cooperate with reformist forces in the fight against existential threats such as fascism or imperialist wars?**

6.2 Strategy and tactics

The terms strategy and tactics play an important role in Marxism-Leninism, but originally come from military theory. military terms, strategy refers to the longer-term and fundamental framework that is adopted in order to achieve a more distant goal, e.g. winning a war or weakening a rival state and isolating it internationally. Tactics, on the other hand, refers to individual military operations within this framework. The class struggle between the working class and capital can certainly be compared to a war. Even if it is not carried out by force of arms most of the time, it is nevertheless permanently violent in character. Even if the working class does not put up any organized resistance, let alone wage a deliberate struggle for political power, the class struggle is still waged by the ruling class. Every working-class family that is forced to live in a tiny apartment, that cannot even afford a bus ticket and does not even dare to dream of an annual vacation, experiences the violence of the ruling class on its own body. Every worker who loses his job because he has founded a works council or organized a strike, every communist who is banned from working for his convictions, is a victim of the bourgeoisie's war against the working class. At the end of the day, the bourgeoisie has not shied away from any massacre, crime or genocide in history in order to suppress the struggle of the working class. In order to counter this, the working class must organize itself and, as in a war, pursue a conscious strategy and tactics. Only then will it be possible to win this struggle at all.

What do strategy and tactics mean in relation to the revolutionary struggle?

Taken together, the strategy and tactics of the Communist Party are the plan of action for the conquest of power by the working class. In the earlier Marxist writ-

ings, strategy and tactics are not yet sharply differentiated. Lenin also used the term tactics in the sense of the party's general long-term line (e.g. in „Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution", LW 9, pp. 1-130). Stalin is the first to make a clear distinction between the two terms.

6.2.1 What do the terms strategy and tactics mean?

Stalin writes: „*Strategy is the determination of the direction of the main blow of the proletariat on the basis of the given stage of the revolution, the elaboration of a corresponding plan for the formation of the revolutionary forces (the main and secondary reserves), the struggle for the realization of this plan during the whole course of the given stage of the revolution.*" (Stalin: On the Foundations of Leninism, SW 6, p. 134). Strategy thus determines the general direction of the struggle and concerns alliance policy („main and secondary reserves" of the revolution). When Stalin writes that strategy always refers to a particular stage of the revolution, this must be understood in its historical context—in Russia, from 1903 to February 1917, the Bolsheviks initially waged a struggle to overthrow tsarism and eliminate the remnants of feudalism, whereby the working class already represented the main force of the revolution and was allied with the peasantry. After the bourgeois February Revolution of 1917, the main goal of the struggle was the overthrow of capitalism in Russia and withdrawal from the imperialist war. The main force here was still the working class, but its closest allies were no longer the peasantry as a whole, but only the mass of middle and poor peasants who had an interest in the socialist transformation of agriculture.

Alongside the question of reform and revolution, the central question of strategy is therefore the assessment of the character of the revolution. Should the working class fight directly for socialism, i.e. for a state of the working class and the socialization of the means of production? Or must it first fight in alliance with the bourgeoisie or parts of it for a bourgeois upheaval and enforce capitalist conditions, so that only then can the path to socialism be taken?

Today, monopoly capitalism has established itself worldwide. In most countries, the bourgeoisie clearly holds political power, even if there are still remnants of pre-capitalist social structures, especially in rural areas (e.g. the caste system in India). As a rule, therefore, the question of several stages of revolution no longer arises, but the socialist revolution is the next goal on the agenda.

„*Tactics is the determination of the line of action of the proletariat for the relatively short period of the tide or ebb of the movement, of the rise or fall of the revolution; it is the struggle for the execution of this line by replacing the old forms of struggle and organization with new ones, the old solutions with new ones, by combining these forms, and so on. If strategy pursues the goal of winning the war, let us say, against tsarism or against the bourgeoisie, of bringing the struggle against tsarism or against the bourgeoisie to an end, tactics sets itself less essential goals, for it does not aim to win the war as a whole, but this or that battle, this or that battle, to successfully*

carry out this or that campaign, this or that action that corresponds to the concrete situation in the period of the given rise or fall of the revolution. Tactics is a part of strategy that is subordinate to it and serves it. Tactics change depending on whether we have high tide or low tide." (ibid., p. 135f).

This explanation shows that tactics have a more short-term, less fundamental and therefore more flexible character than strategy. Tactics can change greatly in a short period of time, depending on how the balance of power in the class struggle develops. An offensive tactic that is correct in an upswing phase of the movement and advances the development of the working class into a conscious revolutionary force can be wrong in a downswing phase because it does not tie in with the consciousness of the class and therefore leads to the communists isolating themselves from the masses. There is no eternally valid textbook wisdom here that only needs to be memorized and then applied. The communist party has the complicated task of scientifically analyzing the concrete situation again and again and finding the steps that best serve the strategic goal in this situation. „*It is not enough*," Lenin wrote, „*to be a revolutionary and a supporter of socialism or a communist in general. One must know how to find at every moment that particular link in the chain which must be grasped with all one's strength in order to hold the whole chain and prepare the transition to the next link with a firm hand*" (Lenin: The Next Tasks of Soviet Power, LW 27, p. 265).

The Party can only this task if it constantly analyzes the entirety of social relations, the classes and strata among each other, their level of consciousness, the international situation and the development of the capitalist economy of its country and draws its conclusions from this.

At the tactical level, important goals are, for example, to rouse and mobilize the workers with a certain slogan, to advance the organization in a company or to expose the dirty role of a certain bourgeois party. However, the fact that tactical goals are chosen more flexibly and at short notice does not mean that they are arbitrary. Tactics are not independent of strategy, but part of it and subordinate to it. Whether a tactical measure is revolutionary or not depends solely on whether or not it ultimately serves the strategic goal. No form of struggle is fundamentally excluded, but none is made absolute either. Therefore, the communist party must be prepared to use all methods of struggle, regardless of whether they are legal or not according to the legal system of capitalist society.

The strategy is therefore the more fundamental element of the Communist Party's policy and will therefore be included in the program of the party for a longer period of time. A change of direction in strategy can only be made if it can be justified that the previous strategy was wrong or if the social circumstances have changed so fundamentally that there can be talk of a completely new stage of the revolutionary struggle. The strategy is thus determined by the fundamental character of the epoch. Since the end of the 19th century, this epoch has been that of imperialism, the domination of monopoly capital. The next stage of development

from monopoly capital, however, is socialism. This means that there is or can be no intermediate stage between monopoly capitalism and socialism. Of course, socialism is not built in one day after the revolution, but requires a long and complicated process of development. There are also various stages and phases of development in this process. However, from the very beginning, from the start of the revolutionary seizure of power, it is about building workers' power and the gradual transition to the socialization of the means of production. There is therefore no intermediate phase between the rule of the bourgeoisie and the rule of the working class. Even in Lenin's time, there were reformist positions that wanted to replace revolution with gradual „transitional stages". Lenin emphasized that „*the transitional stage between the state as the ruling body of the capitalist class and the state as the ruling body of the proletariat is precisely the **revolution**, which consists in the **overthrow** of the bourgeoisie and the **breaking**, the smashing of the state machine of the **bourgeoisie***" (Lenin: The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky, LW 28, p. 325).

6.2.2 Revolutionary strategy and national characteristics

Throughout history, the communist movement has often taken the position that the strategy in a given country should be determined primarily on the basis of national characteristics. This would mean that a strategy that has proven to be correct in one country may have no meaning for another. This argument was put forward, for example, by forces who to declare the experiences of the October Revolution to be a historical peculiarity and to take a completely different, reformist path to socialism for the countries of Western Europe. Lenin already rejected such ideas: „*We know which class stands at the center of this or that epoch and determines its essential content, the main direction of its development, the most important peculiarities of the historical situation in the respective epoch, and so on. Only on this basis, i.e., if we consider first and foremost the basic distinguishing features of different ‚epochs' (but not of individual episodes in the history of individual countries), can we build our tactics correctly* (it has already been mentioned that when Lenin speaks of „tactics" he often means what we today call „strategy", KP*); and only knowledge of the main features of a particular epoch can serve as a basis for judging the more detailed peculiarities of this or that country.*" (Lenin: Under a false flag, LW 21, p. 134, emphasis in original).

Why is that the case? Do national characteristics play no role in the politics of the communists? Do the balance of power between the classes not play a role? Of course they do. The degree of development of capitalism in a country, the size of the working class and other classes (e.g. small farmers), questions of national and popular culture, ethnic and linguistic minorities, etc., etc., all of this must be taken into account in the tactics of the communists. The balance of power, i.e. the level of consciousness of the working class, the degree of its organization, etc., also play a role in communist politics.

However, the development of capitalist society is determined by its fundamental contradictions and laws of development. The basic contradiction of capitalism, which becomes even more pronounced in the imperialist era, is that between social production and private appropriation. In capitalism, the working class is the bearer of social production because it produces in an overall social context. However, it is not society that the wealth produced, but a class of private owners, the bourgeoisie. This contradiction, the exploitation of labor power, is the basis of all the other contradictions, contradictions and conflicts in capitalist society. It must therefore also be the starting point of the revolutionary strategy, because the resolution of this fundamental contradiction is nothing other than the revolutionary transition to a socialized, socialist mode of production. In countries where the capitalist mode of production is the predominant one (which means: countries in which monopoly capital is the driving force of development), there is therefore no other resolution of the fundamental contradiction than the socialist revolution of the working class. Even a comparatively backward level of capitalist development in a country does not mean that socialism is impossible there for the time being. This is because the development of the productive forces cannot be viewed independently of the relations of production—under socialist relations of production, which represent a higher level of society compared to capitalism, an accelerated development of the productive forces is possible, so that the full development of the material developments for socialism can still be made up for in part under socialist conditions. This is also shown, for example, by the history of the Soviet Union. While the reformist Mensheviks, for example, argued that socialism was not yet possible due to Russia's low level of economic development, socialist construction in the proved that it possible to accelerate the development of the productive forces and create the material conditions for socialism under the conditions of a socialist planned economy.

6.2.3 The revolutionary subject in capitalism

Under capitalism, the working class is the revolutionary subject. Revolutionary subject means that the working class in capitalist society is the class that, due to its position in the production process and in society, has the consistent interest and ability to overthrow capital and abolish private ownership of the means of production. It is true that peasants or small shopkeepers are also in opposition to the bourgeoisie, are put under pressure by it and pushed down into the proletariat. But at the same time they are struggling to preserve their small private property, which is why there will always be factors that prevent them from consistently supporting the socialist revolution. Unlike the working class, they are also not concentrated in the factories and do not work collectively like the working class. The petty bourgeoisie therefore also lack the economic basis for feeling that they belong to the same class with common interests. In contrast to the working class, these strata are therefore fundamentally vacillating strata that can be won over to an alliance with the working class, but are also open to capture by the bourgeoisie.

This distinguishes them from the working class, but also from the bourgeoisie. For the capitalist class bases its entire existence on the exploitation of the working class. It is true that there are also conflicts within the bourgeoisie that are by no means irrelevant to the working class and the communists—because they give rise to constant political conflicts within the bourgeoisie and between the capitalist states, right up to imperialist wars. These influence the conditions under which the class struggle takes place. They hinder the unity of the capitalists, disrupt the effectiveness of their exercise of power and, in the event of war, can even lead to the collapse of the capitalist ruling apparatus. The communist party must carefully analyze all this and, where the opportunity arises, resolutely exploit it in order to advance the revolutionary cause. Nevertheless, these conflicts do not mean that an alliance with sections of the bourgeoisie is possible. For the conflicts of interest in the bourgeoisie concern the distribution of profit, which the capitalists appropriate by squeezing the workers. Despite all their contradictions, the capitalists agree with the working class that the rule of capital must be maintained and that the most favorable conditions of exploitation should be created. They are therefore united in preventing the organization of the working class, which could take a share of the profits from capital.

6.2.4 The policy of alliances of the Communists

The same applies to the bourgeois parties. These also differ according to their political programs. On the one hand, they develop different political options for the ruling class, but on the other hand they often also represent

to a certain extent, the different factions of capital. But they too all stand for the protection of the capitalist order against the working class and the administration of the capitalist profit economy. Bourgeois parties, including reformist social democracy in its various forms, are therefore just as little an ally for the communist party the bourgeoisie itself. For cooperation with bourgeois parties is ultimately nothing other than cooperation with the bourgeoisie, with imperialism, even if it is led by honest communists with the goal of socialism.

The alliance with bourgeois forces is an alliance negotiated among themselves by the leaderships of the various organizations and parties, i.e. an alliance „from above“. In its character, it fundamentally from the kind of alliances that communists should strive for, namely alliances „from below“, alliances of the masses themselves, of the various strata of the working class with each other and with other strata such as the urban petty bourgeoisie, the peasantry and the intelligentsia. The class alliance „from below“ is created by bringing together the various struggles of the people for better living conditions by merging them contact between the struggling individuals and placing them under the same strategic goal.

Alliances „from above“, i.e. party and organizational alliances, on the other hand, generally run counter to the self-organization of the working class and its own activity. They inhibit the development of class consciousness simply because they

inevitably create the illusion that the communists have a common basis with bourgeois forces such as social democracy, or that they merely represent different variants of the same direction („left parties", „democratic progressive forces", etc.). In reality, however, the opposite is the case: all parties that objectively or even knowingly stand for the preservation of capitalism are fundamentally opposed to the programme of the communists, they ultimately fight for the exact opposite—against the independent self-organization of the working class, against its liberation from the yoke of exploitation. That the working class comes to this realization is decisive for the success of the class struggle. The alliance policy of the communist party must also serve this purpose, which is why it cannot make common cause with the parties of the bourgeoisie.

6.2.5 The components of the revolutionary strategy

The content of revolutionary strategy is thus essentially the plan according to which the communist party works to ensure that the working class can fulfill its role as a revolutionary subject. This includes, firstly, the question of the goal of the struggle, i.e. the character of the revolution.

Secondly, and related to this, is the question of how the working class must organize itself for the class struggle and ultimately the revolution, how the largest possible sections of the class can be drawn into the struggle and united in it in order to achieve the greatest possible awareness of their situation and the possibility of their victory. For although the working class as a class is the revolutionary subject, this does not mean that it is already acting as a class on the political stage without further ado, i.e. of its own accord. It can only act unitedly and for a clear goal if it is organized and only through its organizations: Class-struggle trade unions, mass organizations in working-class neighborhoods, mass organizations of schoolchildren, students, women, etc. But also through organized political movements, such as the anti-fascist mass self-protection or an anti-imperialist peace movement. And finally, of course, through the communist party as the most consistent part of the working class.

Thirdly and finally, the question of the „secondary reserves" of the revolution, i.e. the allies of the working class in this struggle. How, under what conditions and to what extent can the various layers of the masses, even if they are not directly part of the working class, be won over to this struggle?

The answers to these questions cannot simply be put off until the future. It is not possible to „first lead the class struggle" before dealing with the fundamental questions of strategy. For the forms, demands and focal points of the struggle essentially on the revolutionary goal set by the working class and especially its most conscious section, the communist party.

Working questions

- **Why must the revolutionary struggle be waged on the basis of a strategy and tactics?**
- **What is meant by the strategy and tactics of the Communist Party in each case?**

Discussion questions

- **The thesis is put forward that the communist movement everywhere should set itself the transition to socialism as an immediate strategic task. Is this plausible?**
- **Should alliances with non-communist parties be fundamentally rejected as alliances „from above"?**

6.3 The proletarian revolution

The establishment of capitalist society took place everywhere in one form or another through revolutionary class struggles. In France, these struggles led to the bourgeoisie seizing political power in the Great French Revolution. In other countries, the emergence of a bourgeois-capitalist state took a different course, sometimes in compromise with the old ruling class of the feudal nobility (e.g. in Germany). But the bourgeois revolution as such took place everywhere.

6.3.1 The difference between the proletarian revolution and earlier revolutions

The new social order of socialism can also only assert itself by revolutionary means. However, the socialist revolution is in two respects a more radical revolution than the bourgeois revolutions were. Firstly, its aim is not to replace one exploiting class with another, but to abolish exploitation and private ownership of the means of production altogether. Unlike previous social upheavals, the proletarian revolution therefore also creates a new form of political rule for the first time, in which the vast majority really does exercise power and shape society according to its interests and needs. Secondly, the proletarian revolution differs from the bourgeois revolution in that it begins as a political upheaval and is only followed by the reorganization of the entire society and economy. The bourgeois revolutions were quite different: the emergence of capitalist economic and social structures began long before the revolution in the bosom of feudalism, especially in the cities. However, this is not possible with the socialist mode of production.

Socialist social relations do not arise automatically within capitalist society. One reason for this is that the capitalist mode of production subordinates all other social structures to itself and transforms them in the capitalist sense. Even, for

example, economic activity in cooperatives or cooperatives, which superficially shows certain similarities with socialist forms of production and sometimes emerges from the „occupation" of bankrupt companies, does not allow a break from the capitalist framework. The same applies to state enterprises under capitalist conditions. As long as capitalism as a whole continues to exist and remains the predominant mode of production, cooperatives or state-owned enterprises will continue to produce for the capitalist market. They have to make their products cheaper and adapt to demand, they have to make a profit and cannot pay their workers too high a wage in order to remain competitive. Due to competition, they can also go bankrupt, which means that the risk ultimately remains with the workers or the state, which usually passes the losses on to the working class via the tax system. Cooperatives or state-owned enterprises make no contribution to the better organization of the working class or to the emergence of a revolutionary consciousness. They do not challenge the rule of capital and are therefore not perceived as a danger and fought against by the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, they can be very useful for the ruling class in certain phases of development, because nationalization allows capital to be reorganized on a stronger basis and losses are passed on to society as a whole—often in order to privatize the companies again at a later date.

Socialist society, the central planning of production under the rule of the working class, can only prevail as the result of a revolution that achieves both—firstly, the destruction of the political class rule of capital and the establishment of a workers' state, and secondly, the creation of a new economic order with social ownership of the means of production and central planning. This is another reason why the socialist revolution represents a much more profound social upheaval than previous revolutions.

6.3.2 What is the main question of the revolution?

„*The main question of every revolution is undoubtedly the question of state power. Which class has power in its hands decides everything.*" (Lenin: One of the Key Questions of the Revolution, LW 25, p. 378). For without the conquest of political power by the working class, without the creation of a new state in which the working class and the masses of the people exercise power, the construction of the new society cannot tackled. As long as the bourgeois-capitalist state continues to exist, its various apparatuses will fight every effort to bring about a revolutionary change in society by all means and will ultimately know how to prevent it. Even if the communist party is in government, the remaining state apparatuses will remain in the hands of the bourgeoisie and will be able to prevent the communists from taking revolutionary measures; they will either to incorporate the communists into the bourgeois system as left-wing „fig leaves" until they no longer pose a threat to capitalism, or to overthrow their government by force.

The state is the most effective, best organized machine for enforcing class rule

there is. As long as the working class has not built up its own state power, it has nothing comparable to oppose it. Therefore, a peaceful path to socialism as a march through the institutions of the state is not possible. There is no way around the overthrow and destruction of this machine in order to bring the working class to power. The smashing of the capitalist state refers above all to the organs of the state and specifically on the organs of repression, i.e. for example the government and its apparatuses, the army, the police and secret services. Certainly, there are also certain apparatuses that can be taken over by workers' power in a modified form, e.g. the public infrastructure, parts of the administration, etc. But this does not change the necessity of the revolutionary seizure of power.

6.3.3 How does a revolutionary situation arise?

But if the bourgeois state is so powerful, how can the working class overthrow it at all? Isn't the idea of a workers' revolution just a beautiful dream that cannot be realized?

Most of the time, unfortunately, the capitalist state is actually too powerful to be overthrown by revolution. It is not enough that the working class is well organized and that there is a communist party that plays a leading role in the struggles. As long as capitalist society develops along „ordinary" lines, i.e. without major crises, the bourgeois state still has enough options to mislead the working class at the decisive moment, to lure it with false promises or temporary concessions and to suppress it by force.

Unfortunately for capitalists, however, capitalism is not only characterized by periods of political stability. The accumulation of capital is interrupted by regular economic crises, which tend to become more frequent and deeper in developed capitalism. As a result, the economic scope for economic concessions to the working class regularly dwindles, i.e. luring them with higher wages, social security and the promise of a better future. The impoverishment of broad sections of the population, the social descent of parts of the petty bourgeoisie into the proletariat, persistent mass unemployment etc. expose the propaganda lie of the

„Prosperity for all" in the eyes of more and more people. The economic crises favor the emergence of political crises in which the rule of the previous political representation of capital is openly questioned by the masses. In these times, the bourgeoisie tries to restore confidence in capitalism among the masses by installing new, „fresh" political forces, or at least to convince the working class that there is no alternative and that a revolution is impossible or would only make things worse.

However, it cannot prevent **revolutionary situations** from repeatedly arising in which its rule its shaken: „*For a revolution to take place it is not enough for the exploited and oppressed masses to realise the impossibility of living in the old way, and demand changes; for a revolution to take place it is essential that the exploiters*

should not be able to live and rule in the old way. It is only when the "lower classes" do not want to live in the old way and the "upper classes" cannot carry on in the old way that the revolution can triumph. This truth can be expressed in other words: revolution is impossible without a nation-wide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters). It follows that, for a revolution to take place, it is essential, first, that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class-conscious, thinking, and politically active workers) should fully realise that revolution is necessary, and that they should be prepared to die for it; second, that the ruling classes should be going through a governmental crisis, which draws even the most backward masses into politics (symptomatic of any genuine revolution is a rapid, tenfold and even hundredfold increase in the size of the working and oppressed masses—hitherto apathetic—who are capable of waging the political struggle), weakens the government, and makes it possible for the revolutionaries to rapidly overthrow it." (Lenin: "Left-Wing" Communism, an infantile disorder, LW 31, p. 71f).

In history, such situations have very often arisen as a result of wars, especially as a result of a military defeat of the ruling class in its own country. This is because in war, the ruling class is forced to devote all its resources to the war effort. Defeat can drive the state apparatus to the brink of collapse. At the same time, a large part of the working class is armed and impoverishment reaches unprecedented levels in peacetime, leading to growing discontent among the population. At the end of the First World War, this led to revolutions in various countries such as Russia, Germany, Hungary and Finland, although only the Russian revolution was ultimately victorious. After the Second World War, socialism spread to Eastern Europe, China, Vietnam and Korea and in many other countries the communist parties gained enormous strength.

A revolutionary situation, in which both the rule of the bourgeoisie is decisively weakened and the working class and popular strata want fundamental changes, also arises due to objective factors—i.e. through social development and not just through a specific policy of the communist party. A revolutionary situation cannot simply be brought about at will by the communists simply pursuing the right policies and thereby accumulating forces step by step. Analyzing and understanding the relationship between objective and subjective factors in the emergence of a revolutionary situation in more detail cannot be done here; it is a question for further clarification of the question of strategy in the communist movement.

6.3.4 Preparing for the revolution

The task of the Communist Party is to prepare itself as well as possible for the revolutionary situation by strengthening its own ranks, sharpening its scientific view of social conditions and building up its influence on the working class in the trade unions and various forms of mass organization. For all this, it is crucial that it develops its policies on the basis of a clear revolutionary strategy that as a compass for every single concrete decision. Among these conditions, even a relatively

small Communist Party, which under „normal" conditions does not have a majority in the working class behind it, can suddenly influence in the revolutionary situation and play a leading role in the face of an explosive rise in revolutionary sentiment among the masses. The preparation of the „subjective factor", i.e. the organized revolutionary working class, for the corresponding development of the „objective factor", i.e. for the maturing of the revolutionary situation, is the central task of the communist party within capitalist society.

It is therefore important to understand that the revolutionary movement does not develop as a slow, gradual accumulation of forces until at some point it is strong enough to take power. This is not possible because capitalist society does not develop in this way either. The various factors that promote or inhibit the rise of class consciousness depend, on the one hand, on the development of the capitalist economy, its rhythms, upswings and crises. On the other hand, they also depend on political events such as wars, political unrest, conflicts within the ruling class and so on. This is why the development of the workers' movement will be very sluggish in certain phases, and lose strength in others, only to experience a massive acceleration again. The Communist Party must be aware of this and be able to analyze and assess the signs of the prevailing development trend in order to react appropriately. Otherwise, it will not be prepared to play a leading role in the spontaneous upswing of the movement, while in the downturn it will not see the temporary nature of this development and may lose courage as a result. A strong and ideologically clear Communist Party is in a position, even in unfavorable times, to withstand pressure exerted on it from all sides (demands to adapt to bourgeois ideology, to abandon its revolutionary goals, etc.), not to collapse and even to strengthen its membership base.

6.3.5 The role of the Communist Party in the revolution

However, the successful implementation of the revolution under the conditions of the revolutionary situation is not the task of the party alone. It is the task of the working class and its allies, who themselves must be mobilized and organized. There can be no rigid separation between the party and the working class, but the party must have deep roots in the working class and be accepted by it as a revolutionary leadership. However, the organs of power that take over state power in the revolutionary situation are not organs of the party, but councils that function as organs of the will of the people. The class-struggle workers' movement is already creating these councils in the course of the class struggle, simply because they represent the most suitable form in which the workers' movement can unite its forces and make democratic decisions. In the revolution, however, they take on a special significance because, as the place where the will of the revolutionary masses crystallizes and expresses itself, they also become the organs that take the place of the old, capitalist state power, take over the affairs of government and organize the first revolutionary measures (to provide for the people most in

need, to nationalize the largest enterprises, to protect the revolution from internal and external opponents, etc.). The councils in themselves do not yet have a revolutionary character; after all, councils also exist under capitalism (e.g. works councils, neighborhood councils, etc.). Whether they develop into an organ of revolutionary power or not depends on the influence of the communist party and its correct approach.

The Communist Party can therefore by no means take power instead of the working class and yet it plays the decisive role in the revolution. As the organized vanguard of the working class (see below), it is also and especially in the revolutionary situation the force that points out the only way out in favor of the working class and fights to direct all forces towards this goal. At this point, the communists must already play a recognized leading role in all areas of the class struggle so that their political solution, socialism, is heard and discussed and adopted by the masses as a serious possibility. They organize the masses and enable them to recognize the circumstances correctly. There must therefore be political leadership of the masses by the party even before the revolution, even if it will not be possible within capitalism for the Marxist worldview to become the dominant one throughout society. It is also imperative that the Communist Party play an active leading role in carrying out the revolutionary seizure of power. This is because the planning and implementation of such an action cannot carried out by decentralized or broad-based mass organizations, which are to a certain non-committal. It requires a high degree of centralization and rapid decision-making by an organ that combines in its leadership the highest degree of comprehensive knowledge of the situation and the wishes of the masses, revolutionary foresight, a sense of responsibility and patience.

Nevertheless, the implementation of the revolution is the opposite of an undemocratic putsch, as is often portrayed in anti-communist propaganda. This is because the party acts in the revolution as the most conscious, best organized part of the revolutionary class and cannot override the will of the working class. In the course of the revolution, the communist party must decide on concrete steps and measures, including measures to seize power. his follows from the fact that it is the only force that is organized enough and concentrates the experience of the entire movement in itself to be able to make such decisions.

However, it does not generally decide on the timing of the revolution, since it can only act in a situation in which the vast majority of the working class and the masses are already in opposition to the capitalist system and accept the leading role of the communist party and its worldview in their struggle. Nor does the party itself, as a small clique and independent of the masses, take power, but rather guides the broad masses of working people in taking control of their own living conditions. Of course, in the case of a successful proletarian revolution, the cadres and functionaries of the communist party also play a decisive role in the construction of socialism and the organs of workers' power. However, they do this because of the support they receive from the masses and not simply because

of party decisions. If the party acts against the will of the majority of the class it cannot succeed, because the communists can only prevail against the power of the old ruling class and its allies at home and abroad if their program of social uprising is supported by the broad masses.

The revolutionary uprising of the working class, the smashing of the capitalist state and the confrontation with the oppressive apparatuses of the state are of course not a leisurely stroll in the park. It is a matter of shutting down the bourgeoisie's entire machine of violence and creating a fundamentally new state that directly involves the broadest masses in the administration and transformation of society. Even the expropriation and divestiture of industrial enterprises, banks, public transportation, land, etc. will not be carried out in agreement with the previous owners. On the contrary, these means of production are taken from them with the help of the new state power in order to put them at the service of society as a whole.

Working questions

- **Why can socialism only be achieved through revolution?**
- **What is the main issue of the revolution and why is it so?**
- **Under what conditions is a socialist revolution possible?**
- **What is meant by the objective and subjective factors?**

Discussion questions

- **Should the Communist Party wait for a revolutionary situation to arise, or are there perhaps ways to accelerate the path to socialism?**
- **Is it right for the Communist Party to lead the revolutionary upheaval? Is it not taking the decision away from the masses?**

6.4 Proletarian internationalism

The class struggle is primarily waged at the national level. State power only exists at national level, there is no „world state" or anything similar. Even the formation of intergovernmental institutions and alliances such as the EU does not fundamentally change this. This is why the struggle for working class power is primarily determined by the nation state. The conditions under which the class struggle develops are determined above all by the development of the national economy, national politics, etc. and the organizations of the working class at the national level.

Nor do we, as internationalists, adopt a hostile stance towards every concept of the homeland as such or the patriotic feelings of the masses. For these feelings are by no means directed against other countries or peoples. Rather, they can be a starting point for the class struggle, because it is capital that subjugates the

homeland to the profit motive, ruthlessly destroys the environment and leads the country and its people into wars in which they have nothing to gain. In many countries, national liberation struggles of the peoples oppressed by imperialist or other reactionary states have played and continue to play an important role and have been linked to the revolutionary struggle for socialism: from the national anti-fascist liberation struggles during the Second World War (in Yugoslavia, Greece, Italy, the Soviet Union, etc.), to anti-imperialist and anti-racist struggles during the Second World War (in the Soviet Union, Greece, etc.).From the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movements led by Marxist forces in China, Korea, Vietnam, Angola, Ghana, Burkina Faso and many other African countries, Cuba, Central America, etc. to today's resistance of the Palestinian people against Israeli occupation and oppression, there are countless examples.

However, although it is wrong to deny or neglect the national element of the class struggle, the national organization of the working class is not enough. For imperialism is not limited to individual nation states, but is the dominant system worldwide. This is true not only in the general sense that monopoly capitalism dominates the entire globe and that policy is primarily made in its interests. It also true in the sense that, despite their differences and conflicts, the imperialists of all countries work together to take action against the workers' movement. Despite the inter-imperialist contradictions, there are international organizations and regulations that serve the more effective exploitation of the working class by capital, the safeguarding of private property, etc. all over the world. The working class today, on the other hand, is hardly organized internationally at all; there is no longer a revolutionary world organization that could develop and implement a common strategy for the workers of the world. The working class therefore has little to oppose the international cooperation of capital.

6.4.1 Why does the working class need an international organization?

The need for an international organization of the working class also arises from the fact that capitalism develops and reinforces the interdependence of countries. What happens in one country often has multiple effects on neighboring countries, allies and trading partners and the world system as a whole. An economic crisis in the USA has an immediate effect on the economy in Europe, while a conflict or even a war between China and the USA affects not only these two countries, but the whole world. This interdependence means that without international organization, the working class will not be able to respond to international challenges together. The class struggle then remains isolated within the nation state and the weapon of class solidarity can hardly be used effectively. At the same time, the working class of one country is also dependent on the workers of other countries. The success of the class struggle or even the victory of the socialist revolution in one country favors and facilitates the struggle in other countries. Historical experience shows that revolutions have always had an influence the level of con-

sciousness in other countries far beyond national borders. In the years that followed, the October Revolution of 1917 led to revolutionary struggles in Germany, Hungary, Finland, Italy, Mongolia, etc. and to the founding of communist parties in most countries of the world.

The working class can only win its struggle if it does not allow itself to be divided along national lines. This applies both to the relationship between the workers of different countries and to the workers of one country. No country in the world is ethnically homogeneous. Capitalism constantly causes migration and flight because it produces misery everywhere, drives small farmers off their land, plunges people into unemployment or causes imperialist wars and proxy conflicts, so that for many people it can become a question of survival to leave their own homeland. As a result, people of different origins, skin color, language, culture and religion mix in every country. The majority of these migration movements affect the working class, as their cause is usually a flight from misery or war. In the vast majority of cases, migrants therefore live under conditions of particular poverty and oppression. In the vast majority of cases, migrants therefore live in conditions of particular poverty and oppression. They usually do not have the same rights as the local working class, are affected by deportations, racist state discrimination and are often defenseless against violent attacks by fascists.

6.4.2 Racism and nationalism

In the working class, racism and nationalism act as divisive factors that set one section of the class against another and thus distract from capital and imperialism as the real enemy of all workers. It should therefore come as no surprise that racist consciousness is promoted in many ways by the state, the mass media and often enough by employers in the workplace in order to push through political goals and weaken the organization of the working class. A working class that is divided along national or other lines is weak and can easily be defeated.

Racism and nationalism also have other functions for capital. For example, the racist devaluation of the peoples of other countries also serves to justify imperialist wars—e.g. by claiming that the aim is to bring „civilization“ or „democracy“ to these allegedly „uncivilized“ people, or by presenting the violent enforcement of imperialist interests as defense of the fatherland. Imperialism always goes hand in hand with the domination, oppression and, at times, direct colonization of the peoples of other countries and continents. Oppression of this kind can only be maintained by an ideology that assumes the superiority of the „white man“ or „Western values“ and social models. Even in times of peace, nationalist blindness serves to make the workers of a country identify with the economic success of „their“ capitalists or „their“ state, because they do not understand that the success capital is only achieved on their backs and at their expense.

All these ideological influences have an extremely harmful effect on the consciousness of the working class and communists must fight them resolutely. They

must show that the workers of all nationalities have a common interest in overthrowing the exploitative system and that only a common struggle has any chance of success.

6.4.3 The experiences of three internationals in the working class

The working class already has a long history of experience with forms of international organization. In 1847, the League of Communists was founded in London with the participation of Marx and Engels. This was the first revolutionary association of communists claiming to represent the working class internationally. In 1864, also in London, the International Workingmen's Association (IWA) or First International emerged, which brought together various socialist workers' organizations. In this First International of the working class, however, there were still politically very different currents, so that a truly powerful common struggle could not emerge. In addition to Marx and Engels, who stood for a communist orientation of the International, the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin also great influence. Bakunin rejected a central leadership of the International and the struggle for the rule of the working class. This conflict led to a split in the International, ultimately resulting in its complete dissolution in 1876.

In 1889, after the death of Marx, the Second International was founded in Paris with the strong involvement of Engels. Before the start of the First World War, the workers' parties of the International had pledged to fight together against the war in the event of a conflict. However, when war broke out in 1914, the vast majority of the parties of the International sided with the imperialists of their own country and supported the war. This showed how much the workers' parties had been corrupted by opportunism and bourgeois influences, how much their revolutionary rhetoric had been reduced to hollow phrases. As a result of this open betrayal of the working class, the Second International effectively dissolved during the war. It was refounded much later, after the Second World War, but from the outset it was an organization that was hostile to the revolutionary workers' movement and represented an international alliance of bourgeois social democracy.

The consistent revolutionary socialists drew their conclusions from the betrayal of social democracy. The Bolsheviks in Russia had been against the war from the outset and led the workers and peasants to victory in the October Revolution of 1917. Already during the war, Marxists from other countries had begun to reorganize independently of the pro-imperialist leadership of social democracy, for example in the International or Spartacus group in Germany. After the October Revolution, communist parties were founded in countless countries. Often, but not always, these emerged from splits from social democratic parties. In 1919, the founding congress of the Third International, the Communist International (abbreviated to Comintern or CI), took place in revolutionary Moscow. The Comintern was more than just an alliance meeting of communist parties. It was a real

world organization of communists, with regular world congresses at which the delegates decided on the policies of the world communist movement. Between congresses, the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) made the decisions. At this time, the mass organizations of the class struggle were also building up international organizational structures, such as International Red Aid, which organized international campaigns to support political prisoners, and the Red Trade Union International as the umbrella organization of the class-oriented trade unions.

The Comintern also adopted a common program at its VI World Congress in 1928, in which the strategy to strive for a united front with the social democratic workers while at the same time fighting against the social democratic leadership. The VII World Congress then took place in 1935, after fascism had already come to power in Germany and the Comintern was focusing its efforts on pushing back fascist influence everywhere. At this congress, it was then decided that the communist parties forge popular front alliances with the social democratic and other bourgeois parties against fascism. When war broke out after a fascist coup in Spain in 1936, the Comintern organized a historically unprecedented example of proletarian internationalism—the International Brigades, in which mainly communists, but also other anti-fascists from various parts of the world, joined together to fight voluntarily against fascism in Spain. During the Second World War, the Comintern was then dissolved in 1943 on the grounds that the fighting conditions in each country were very different and that the communist parties would therefore be better able to fight for the revolution if they developed their strategy independently.

In 1947, the Communist Information Office (Cominform) was founded, in which some communist parties, but by no means all of them, continued to exchange information. However, the Cominform was dissolved in 1956. Since then, there has been no fixed form of organization for the communist parties. Only non-binding meetings of the communist and workers' parties continue to take place in various constellations, at which no binding resolutions are passed.

The reconstruction of a new communist world organization is therefore the task of communists throughout the world today. However, the prerequisite for this would be unity within the world communist movement, at least on the key strategic issues. In many communist parties, however, reformist and revisionist positions are predominant. However, there can be no organizational unity for communists with these positions, even if an exchange of content with parties can make sense despite fundamental differences in content.

Working questions

- **Why has the labor movement always seen itself as an international movement?**

- **What forms of organization of the working class have existed historically and how have they differed?**

Discussion questions

- **If communists see themselves as internationalists and fight for the global working class, but at the same time relate positively to their homeland, isn't that a contradiction?**
- **The Comintern was dissolved in 1943 because the national conditions were different in each case and a unified world organization of communists was therefore considered obsolete. What is to be thought of this reasoning? Do we need a new Communist International today or not?**

7 The Communist Party

A movement that starts from illusions about capitalism will not be able to develop a revolutionary practical orientation, but will work on unrealistic solutions on the basis of the existing system. It will never pose a threat to capitalism. The development and deep internalization of revolutionary theory is therefore one of the most crucial questions of all for the workers' movement.

Firstly, however, revolutionary theory needs a place where it can be developed and systematically. It does not emerge by itself; it is not enough for a few class-conscious workers to read the classics of Marxism-Leninism. For Marxism-Leninism, scientific socialism, is not a collection of textbook wisdom. It requires constant application to reality, permanent further development and clarification on the basis of political practice, the evaluation of the historical experiences of the movement and the analysis of a constantly changing world. Such demanding systematic scientific work can only be carried out in a certain kind of organization—an organization of the working class that unites the most advanced and consistent representatives of the class and brings together the experiences of the class, evaluates them and draws its conclusions from them.

Secondly, this organization must be in close contact with the working class in order not only to develop scientific socialism, but also to bring it back to the working class in a generally understandable form and to allow its findings to guide the working class in its class struggle.

This organization of the working class, which we are talking about here, can only be the Communist Party. The Communist Party is therefore a party of world outlook, it is the organized bearer of Marxism-Leninism, its entire existence, its internal structure and its politics are based on the scientific insights of this world

outlook.

It is true that there are always spontaneous struggles of the proletariat, acts of resistance against capital, uncontrolled outbursts of popular anger. However, these struggles come to nothing if they lack the organized leadership of the Communist Party. Engels writes: „As long as the oppressed class, in our case the proletariat, is not yet ripe for its self-liberation, it will, for the most part, recognize the existing social order as the only possible one and will politically be the tail of the capitalist class, its extreme left wing“ (Engels: The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, MEW 21, p. 168). Only when the most progressive workers, organized in the Communist Party, take a leading role within the workers' movement will the struggles take on a clear direction, since they are towards the goal of seizing power. Only then will they gain the stamina to continue the struggle again and again, even after setbacks; and the collective judgment and foresight to keep their nerve and make the right decisions in every difficult situation. Only with such leadership can the working class join forces at the decisive moment, in the revolutionary situation, and power. The Communist Party is thus an indispensable, indeed the most important weapon of the working class in its struggle for power.

7.1 Organizational principles of the Communist Party

A party that is to fulfill these tasks, that unites communists into a real community of struggle, that educates new generations of communists, that constantly tests and develops scientific socialism in practice, that enables the working class to organize itself as effectively as possible and to fight for power—such a party must be organized in a very specific way.

The Communist Party (CP) cannot organize itself like the bourgeois parties, in which membership is a more or less formal matter. You receive a party card, pay a membership fee and otherwise decide for yourself to what extent you want to get involved or not. In most cases, however, involvement simply means turning up at a general meeting from time to time, helping out with the election campaign or standing as a candidate. The fact that the bourgeois parties (including the „left“ among them) are organized in this way is a result of their nature and purpose—they are not organizations for the overthrow of class rule; on the contrary, they are precisely instruments for administration and constructive cooperation in capitalism and career channels for the future leaders of the bourgeois state. Ultimately, they are part of the state, so they have all its concentrated power on their side.

7.1.1 The Communist Party as the vanguard of the working class

A Communist Party serves a completely opposite purpose. It is not a means to participate in capitalist institutions, even if this does not mean that it rejects par-

ticipation in parliamentary elections. It exists to organize the working class where it lives and works and to prepare it for the struggle for power. The Communist Party pursues the goal of becoming the vanguard, the **avant-garde** of the working class. This term also comes from military theory and refers to the military unit that represents the vanguard in an attack. The vanguard role of the party consists in the fact that the party represents the organization of the workers with the most progressive, most consistent consciousness, which plays the leading role in the class struggle and is also accepted by the working class as the leadership. What this means exactly will be explained in more detail in the following subchapter.

In this struggle, the Communist Party has the ruling class, the state and the prevailing ideology against it. Potentially, it has the working class and other oppressed classes behind it and thus represents the majority of society. However, most of the time it can only exploit this potential to a limited extent because bourgeois ideology in its various forms continues to prevail in society. More on this later.

Most of the time, the Communist Party fights a battle from a massively unfavorable balance of power. Even a strong Communist Party with mass influence, such as KPD in the 1920s and up to 1933, usually only enjoys the support of a minority of society. How can it still this struggle? By using the resources and forces at its disposal as efficiently as possible to win new members and expand its influence on the masses. But it can only do this if it presents a united front and does not fragment its forces.

The members of the Communist Party must therefore see it as their constant responsibility to play an active role in the class struggle and also in the party itself and to contribute to the best of their ability. There can be different degrees of activity, depending on a person's life situation. However, passivity has no place in the CP.

7.1.2 Democratic Centralism—The Organizational Principle of the Revolutionary Party

The organizational principle in which these requirements are realized is democratic centralism. On the one hand, democratic centralism means that the party's policies and all its important decisions, especially those on strategic issues, are widely discussed within the party so that all arguments for or against a particular position can be heard and weighed up. For less important decisions, on the other hand, it is often sufficient and makes more sense if the discussion is only conducted at the level that authorized to make decisions and has the relevant insight. Finally, the decision is made by majority vote. This decision is then binding for everyone. A decision by the party conference or the highest governing bodies is binding for all party members, a decision by a local party branch is binding for the members who are united in this branch. The binding nature of resolutions means that decisions made are adhered to and implemented even if one does not

personally agree with them. Many people initially have doubts about this rule because they were brought up in bourgeois society with the liberal illusion that freedom consists of being able to do whatever you want as an individual. In reality, however, such freedom never exists, because what an individual can and cannot do, what they want to do at all, their thoughts and actions, are determined by their position in society, their economic opportunities and the restrictions of their class situation. Voluntarily joining a CP, consciously submitting to its discipline in order to collectively influence the course of history, to create a better world—this expresses an incomparably greater degree of freedom of action.

The discipline of decision-making in the Communist Party does not mean that decisions must be accepted uncritically, even if they are rejected. On the contrary, every communist has the right and even the duty to express his opinion within the party especially if he considers the party's policies to be wrong. The other comrades in the party and especially the leadership have a duty to take criticism seriously, not to hinder it but to encourage it, to examine it and, if necessary, to draw consequences for their own actions and those of the party.

Through democratic centralism, the Communist Party is a deeply democratic party. Democracy in the CP is not a dead formal process, as in the bourgeois „democratic" states and parties, where the main thing is to vote for one candidate or another every few years, while the content of policy is essentially determined by capital. In the CP, the electoral process is only one aspect of democratic party life and usually not the most important one. Because political decisions, before they are made but also during and after they are implemented, and the fact that the party's personnel policy, i.e. who should take on which function, is also the subject of extensive discussion means that each individual has a much greater opportunity to influence decisions than would be possible through a simple vote. Centralism also means that experience is brought together, evaluated and made accessible to everyone. Only centralism therefore enables democratic participation in the development of the party as a whole, instead of locally limited participation. The bourgeois understanding of democracy assumes that the opinions of the voters are somehow already fixed and only need to be expressed in the elections. In reality, however, personal opinion is primarily determined by the position one holds in society and how one interprets it, i.e. which ideological influences the individual is subject to—for most people, these are primarily the influences of the bourgeoisie.

In the Communist Party, however, it must be assumed that there is no clash of interests, as everyone is ultimately pursuing the same goal. Of course, there is still a difference of opinion, which is also good and necessary, as only the juxtaposition of different points of view makes it possible to arrive at a truly comprehensive picture that takes into account as many aspects of a matter as possible. However, most differences of opinion can be overcome in the discussion, so that the majority of decisions can be made unanimously.

On the one hand, decision-making in a revolutionary organization must be democratic, i.e. it must take into account the opinions and will of as many members as possible and incorporate them into the decision. On the other hand, it must also be efficient and quick. After all, there is not always time to discuss decisions at length. This does not only apply to extreme situations, in which quick decision-making can even be a matter of life and death. Even under less dramatic conditions, it makes no sense and is not possible to have every detailed decision taken by all the members. Democratic centralism therefore also includes different organizational levels, i.e. an organizational hierarchy.

The highest decision-making body in a CP is always the party congress, because it represents the entire membership of the party. The party congress is a congress to which the local branches of the party send their delegates. The party congress decides on the basic structure of the party and the direction of its policy: the party's statute, i.e. its organizational structure, the party program, i.e. the party's strategy and essential analyses of the political situation, as well as important resolutions on other issues are decided by the party congress. These resolutions are the highest in the party. Changing or revoking them, e.g. adopting a new party program, is only possible at another party congress; no one else has this right.

The Party Congress also elects the Central Committee (CC). The CC is the highest decision-making governing body of the CP between party congresses. This is because a party conference involves a great deal of effort each time and can therefore usually only take place every few years. The Central Committee takes over the political leadership of the party in the interim. It brings together all of the party's experiences and analyzes them centrally. The local branches are guided by the CC. The CC also decides on day-to-day political business, e.g. the reaction to current political developments, the publication of the party newspaper, the organization of major nationwide events, etc. Last but not least, the CC has the task of preparing the party congresses. The decisions of the CC are based on the analysis of the experiences and assessments of the party as a whole, which of course can also mean making decisions contrary to the experiences and assessments of individual party organizations.

In order for the central leadership, but also subordinate leadership bodies of the party (e.g. the leadership bodies of the basic organizations) to be able to maintain an overall view and make the best possible decisions, the party is dependent on a functioning reporting system. The governing bodies need constant reports from all areas that run to the center. At the same time, they serve to convey information and assessments, but also to formulate criticism. Based on the analysis and generalization of these reports, guidelines can then be given for practice in all organizational units. Conversely, the Central Committee must regularly inform the party base about important decisions, discussions and developments.

The basic organizational unit of a CP, on which the entire organization is built, is the basic organization. Every member of the CP, from simple activists to the Ge-

neral Secretary of the Central Committee, must be active in a basic organization. The basic organizations develop policy on the ground, intervene in or initiate struggles and discuss the party's decisions and documents. The basic organizations should therefore essentially be working units. It is important that opinions and arguments on political and ideological issues are also exchanged in them, but they are not discussion circles that talk everything over and conduct discussions as an end in themselves.

7.1.3 Criticism and self-criticism

The basic organizations are also an important place for criticism and self-criticism among communists. Since practice is discussed and evaluated there, there must also be room to criticize the shortcomings and misconduct of individual comrades or entire branches and organs of the party. Criticism of a high-ranking party functionary must be just as possible and natural as criticism of any „ordinary" member. Criticism and self-criticism take place; however, this does not only occur in the basic organization, but throughout the entire organization. The party as a whole can also exercise self-criticism for past mistakes, even in front of the public. Certain questions of general importance for the working class, such as questions of strategy, where it is important to include as many voices and experiences as possible, should generally be discussed in public.

Normally, however, criticism and self-criticism take place internally. In particular, political conflicts are dealt with within the party and resolved in the committees and channels provided for this purpose. They are not brought to the outside world because this can undermine the unified appearance of the party. The more the class opponent knows about tensions and disputes within the Communist Party, the better he can exploit them for his own purposes, distort them in his media, try to deepen the rifts or even identify dissatisfied people who could be recruited as informers.

For this reason, no factions or currents are permitted in a CP. The ban on the formation of factions within the Communist Party was first adopted by the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1921, as a conclusion of historical experience and the logical implementation of democratic centralism. It had been recognized that in previous revolutions the counter-revolution had always been able to exploit conflicts within the revolutionary camp in order to fight the revolution as a whole. The resolution stated, among other things: „T*he absolutely necessary of the Party's shortcomings must be handled in such a way that every practical proposal is forwarded immediately, in the most precise form possible, without any delay, to the local and central leading organs of the Party for discussion and decision. (...) Any analysis of the general line of the Party or the evaluation of its practical experience, the control of the implementation of its decisions, the study of methods for correcting mistakes, etc., must under no circumstances be discussed beforehand in groups formed on the basis of some „platform" and the like, but must be submitted exclusively for direct*

consideration by all Party members" (Original Draft Resolution of the Xth Party Congress of the C.P.R.). Party Congress on the Unity of the Party, LW 32, p. 247). This did not prevent criticism but, on the contrary, directed it into the appropriate channels, thus ensuring that the elected leaders and the entire party dealt with it. The resolution was directed against groups within the party, such as Leon Trotsky and his followers, who attempted to develop their own political line as non-transparent discussion circles behind closed doors and then impose it within the party. All party members were required to submit their criticism to open discussion within the party and thus allow everyone to participate in these discussions. This approach is not only much more transparent, it also places the arguments in the foreground because it prevents undemocratic group dynamics that run counter to the overall collective of the party. It is still upheld today by the Communist parties as a basic principle of democratic centralism.

7.1.4 The Communist Party as a cadre party

The Communist Party is a cadre party. What does that mean? It that it does not aim to gain as many members as possible at any price, but that it places high demands on each individual member to develop as far as possible into a cadre, a communist personality. This is a goal that communists strive for all their lives. No one will ever achieve this goal completely. Communists should always work on their mistakes and weaknesses, but they will never be able to overcome them completely. Nevertheless, it is right and necessary to define the ideal characteristics of a communist cadre. The decisive factor is not whether all these qualities are fulfilled, but whether one is prepared to orient oneself towards and develop this ambitious goal.

A communist cadre is not simply someone who has read a lot of Marx and Lenin or who can show off a CP party card. He is someone in whose life the struggle for socialist revolution plays a central role, who has made it his life's work, so to speak, to organize the working class and to lead and support its struggle. To do this, he must be in close contact with the working class, even and especially if he himself does not come from the working class. He must develop the ability to exert political influence on other people, to encourage, accompany and support them in the development of their class consciousness. He must be at the forefront of the struggles of the working class and work in these struggles for the better organization of the class, for overcoming divisions and fighting illusions. It must be in a position to withstand the various instruments of the opponent, whether they are attempts at integration and bribery or intimidation and repression, even in acute situations of class struggle.

And last but not least, in order to be able to fulfill these tasks, they must have a comprehensive knowledge of Marxism-Leninism, but also of the political situation, the history of the workers' movement and the current policies of the party. As a result, educational and ideological work in the CP is of particular importance.

Without systematic, continuous and good educational work, Party members will not be able to acquire the necessary skills to correctly represent and explain the Party and the cause of communism under all conditions. Without education, they will not be able to make correct assessments and fulfill their role as the vanguard of the working class. The ability of the party as a whole to respond to new developments, to challenges, to the pressure of the bourgeois parties etc. in the best possible way, all their members must acquire this ability. After all, a certain level of political education is in fact the prerequisite for being able to participate in party discussions on an equal footing. Political education should not be understood here as dry book knowledge—although studying texts is an indispensable part of it, so is an understanding of society and the class struggle, which can ultimately only be learned in practice. Participation in educational work is therefore also a duty for every communist.

The character of the CP as a cadre party also has consequences for its membership policy. The CP is not a mass organization and must not be confused with one The fact that the party is not a mass organization does not mean that it can only have a few members. Of course, the Communist Party has the goal of becoming ever stronger, which also means that it must constantly increase its membership. Whether the party is large or small depends on whether the party and its cadres work well, but it also depends on the development of class consciousness among the masses. Since this consciousness develops by leaps and bounds in certain situations, the membership of the Communist Party can also grow only slowly in some phases and rapidly in others.

The statement that the CP is not a mass organization therefore means something else: namely that its aim is not to make everyone who wants to become active on a particular issue a party member. It does not even want to accept everyone who sees themselves as a Marxist or communist. It is the party of communists, but that also means that it places high demands on its members. Most people, even if they sympathize with the party's policies, do not initially meet these requirements. The aim is to as many of them as possible to join the party. However, if joining the Communist Party is premature, it does not lead to the party being strengthened, but to comrades being overtaxed, which often results in them moving away from it again. Therefore, before joining a CP, certain experiences in the class struggle should be gained and the most important basics of Marxism-Leninism should be acquired.

Although the party demands a lot from its members and probably never turn the majority of the working class into party members, it is of course dependent on constantly growing. This presupposes that new individuals who are particularly militant, particularly consistent and particularly advanced in their class consciousness will continue to emerge in the class struggle so that they can be accepted into the party.

The Communist Youth League can also play an important role in preparing new

comrades for membership in the CP. The youth of the working class are naturally also characterized by their class situation. Youth is not a separate class and it has no interests that are independent of the class antagonism. Rather, the youth is also divided into the youth of the workers and the youth of the bourgeoisie, who have opposing and incompatible interests. The communist youth organization therefore naturally does not represent the interests of youth in general, because that does not exist. It represents the interests of working-class youth.

But if working-class youth is only a part of the working class, why have a separate youth association at all? Because the youth of the working class have no fundamental interests that differ from those of the working class, but nevertheless have their own life situation, their own needs, their own approach to politics, etc. Young people are often particularly enthusiastic and more willing to focus their lives on the struggle most adults. They are also often affected by particularly harsh conditions of exploitation. This makes it necessary for the Communist Party to pay special attention to work among young people. Many, but not all, Communist Parties have created a Communist Youth League for this purpose. As a rule, membership of the youth association does not have the same high requirements as membership of the Communist Party, although it is of course necessary for the members of the youth organization to identify with the struggle for communism. The communist youth association is therefore not a mass organization. Whether the founding of such a youth organization is always necessary and helpful would have to be discussed in each specific case, so we will leave it open at this point.

7.1.5 Historical debates on the question of organization

The question of how revolutionaries should organize themselves is a very political one, which is why it has been controversial since the beginnings of the labor movement. The basic organizational principles and characteristics of the Communist Party were already formulated by Marx and Engels. As early as 1848, they explained the character of the Communist Party as the vanguard of the working class: „*The Communists are thus practically the most resolute, ever advancing part of the workers' parties of all countries; theoretically, they have the insight into the conditions, the course and the general results of the proletarian movement ahead of the rest of the mass of the proletariat*" (Marx/Engels: Manifesto of the Communist Party, MEW 4, p. 474). The League of Communists, which Marx and Engels co-founded and for which they wrote the Communist Manifesto, was already organized along the lines of democratic centralism: Only the most conscious and disciplined revolutionary workers organized themselves in it. There was an obligation to comply with resolutions, whereby the highest body of the organization was the congress, as in the later Communist parties, and there was a central leadership between the congresses.

Lenin therefore did not simply „invent" the principles of democratic centralism, but rather adopted, defended, theoretically elaborated and further developed. This further development took place within the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP), the socialist party of the Russian working class at the time, as an internal party dispute. Independent circles of socialists had formed throughout the Russian Empire as a result of the upswing of the labor movement in Europe and the increasing popularity of Marxism, which now had to be brought together to form a unified organizational structure. Within the movement, however, there were widely differing ideas about how such a party should be organized. The Mensheviks around Pavel Axelrod took the position that everyone who helped the party and counted themselves as a member should also count as a member of the party. Lenin describes the Mensheviks' attitude to the question of organization as follows „*Advocacy of a vague, not firmly established party organization; their aversion to the idea (...) of building up the party from the top down, starting from the party congress and the bodies created by it; their endeavor to go from the bottom up and to leave it to every professor, every high school student and ‚every striker' to decide for himself whether he wants to consider himself a party member; their hostility to the ‚formalism' which requires the party member to belong to an organization recognized by the party*" (Lenin: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, MEW 7, pp. 200f).

In his essay „One Step Forward, Two Steps Back" (MEW 7), Lenin explained that only conscious revolutionaries should be organized in the party. The prerequisite for membership must be that one is active in a party organization (e.g. a company cell of the party). It was precisely through strong, disciplined and powerful party organizations that it would be possible to influence broad masses of the working class and promote the development of class consciousness.

The different ideas came to the fore above all at the second party congress of the RSDLP in 1903. Lenin and his comrades fought to transform the RSDLP into a fixed organization with strict discipline, while other forces wanted to maintain the party as a loose structure of circles without clear decision-making discipline and accountability. This led to a de facto split in the party, with the group around Lenin forming the majority. While both wings formally remained in the same party, the party was now divided into the Bolsheviks („majoritarians") and Mensheviks („minoritarians"). The fact that the Bolshevik line was able to prevail was a decisive prerequisite for the majority of the Russian workers' movement maintaining its position against the imperialist First World War in 1914 and for the working class being able to successfully orientate its struggle towards the conquest of power in 1917.

The October Revolution of 1917 finally also demonstrated the validity of the organizational principles laid down by Lenin as the correct basis for the work of a revolutionary party. In the following years, it became clear that even after seizing power, it was necessary for the party to act uniformly and not tolerate the formation of factions within its own ranks. In 1921, the party therefore decided at

its tenth congress that the formation of groups and platforms within the party was not permitted. Instead, political questions and criticism of the party's work should always be discussed with all party members. Leon Trotsky supported this resolution in 1921. Later, however, it posed a problem for his goals in the inner-party struggle against the majority of the party leadership. Trotsky repeatedly organized factions within the party to fight against the party leadership's line. He justified this by claiming that the decision was supposedly only meant to be „temporary". In fact, however, there is nothing to suggest such an interpretation; rather, as explained above, the ban on factions is an important further development of democratic centralism, which leads to a strengthening of inner-party democracy and transparency and is therefore applied in all Marxist-Leninist parties today.

In 1925, the Communist International decided to bolshevize all national sections, i.e. the Communist Parties. A resolution of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) of 4 April 1925 stated: „*The main and basic form of organization of every Bolshevik party is the party cell in the workplace. The old organizational principle adopted by social democracy, according to which the party is built up on the basis of electoral districts in consideration of the needs of parliamentary elections, is unacceptable to the Communists. A genuine Bolshevik party is impossible if its organization is not based on the factory cells*." (ECCI 1925). Bolshevization also meant organizing the Communist Parties according to democratic centralism, i.e. introducing free discussion, criticism and self-criticism, strict decision-making discipline and accountability for all organs of the party. It meant that the Communist Parties made the development of proletarian cadres the central task of party building. It meant developing work in the trade unions everywhere, even the most reactionary of them, as well as other forms of mass work.

In the KPD, bolshevization was driven forward under the leadership of Ernst Thälmann. Nevertheless, the KPD was unable to prevent the victory of fascism over the workers' movement in 1933. The reasons for this must be analyzed, taking into account the Comintern's own analysis of defeat in the following years. As early as 1932, the ECCI had established that many Communist parties, including the KPD in particular, had only undergone a superficial Bolshevization and in many cases were still using the organizational practices of the old social democracy, which prevented them from anchoring themselves in the factories and the working class, consolidating the party members ideologically and protecting the party from repression (Pyatnitsky 1932).

Working questions

- **What are the principles of democratic centralism?**

- **What does it mean that the Communist Party is a cadre party? Why can't it function like a mass organization?**

Discussion questions

- **The Communist Party wants to be the vanguard of the working class. Doesn't that mean patronizing the working class?**
- **Is democratic centralism really the only conceivable organizational principle for a revolutionary workers' party?**

7.2 Relationship between the party and the working class

The communist party is, as has already been explained, the party of the working class. But what exactly does that mean? Firstly, it means that its world view is that of the working class, Marxism-Leninism. Secondly, it means that its program is to the interests of the working class, to establish the rule of the working class and to build socialism. Thirdly, it means that the CP must orient its practice towards organizing the working class above all, both in self-organized mass organizations and in the communist party.

On the other hand, it does not mean that the CP consists only of workers. Of course, people from other strata and classes can also become members of the party if they support the struggle of the working class. The CP must also strive to develop into a workers' party in the sense that the working class is in the majority among the members and in the leadership by focusing the party's work and membership recruitment on the working class.

This focus of practice is of decisive importance. The CP focuses its forces on working with the masses of workers, not, for example, on students, left-wing intellectuals with a petty-bourgeois background or on a sub-cultural „scene". All of the party's activities, its organizational structure, its publications, its cadre development, even its ideological work and educational work are geared towards the goal of organizing the working class for the class struggle and spreading the communist worldview within it.

As a cadre party, the CP is not a mass party per se—at least not in the sense that it strives to gain as many members as possible at a low threshold. On the other hand, this does not mean that a CP cannot still have many members. However, the path to strength does not lie in gaining members at any price, but in improving the quality of its agitation and propaganda, better organization and the development of genuine proletarian leaders for the class struggle.

7.2.1 Party and mass organizations

How can the CP nevertheless fulfill the task of reaching and organizing truly broad masses if it is not designed as a mass organization?

The answer lies in the sharp distinction between the revolutionary organization of communists on the one hand and mass organizations on the other. While only those who are fully convinced of communism and fight for this goal organize themselves in the Communist Party, a mass organization has a completely different character. Mass organizations are recruited from the people on a much broader basis. The most important form of mass organization is the trade union. In a trade union, all workers are organized to fight for their interests and those of their class. This includes the fight for higher wages, for a reduction in working hours with full wage compensation, better safety precautions in the workplace, etc. Communists also have the task of politicizing this struggle, but more on that later. Agreement with a particular world view is not and should not be a criterion. In this sense, we are fighting for trade unions that unite workers from as many sectors and companies as possible, but also from all ideological and political directions. These usually offer the best conditions for the working class to fight unitedly for the interests of the entire class, which all workers have in common, and to develop the necessary clout to really force capital to make concessions.

Communists must not be afraid to work in the same trade unions where their political opponents are active and where most workers follow the parties of the system. The influence of these forces must be pushed back by the communists and other class-struggle workers, but only by exposing their dirty, anti-labor role within the unions and winning the followers of these parties for the common struggle.

In the trade unions, communists therefore have a dual task: on the one hand, they fight for the unity of the class in the class struggle and against any division. On the other hand, however, they must also fight against the bourgeois and opportunist trade union leaders, who will inevitably always turn against the interests of the workers and prefer cooperation with capital to consistent industrial action. Both tasks are closely related: For the opportunism and collaboration of trade union leaders in practice in many cases exacerbate the division of the working class, for example by actively marginalizing the communists or by making „compromises“ that deepen the split between precariously employed workers in the low-wage sector and the better-paid sections of the class. Conversely, these functionaries can rely on the fact that there is a labor aristocracy that would rather try to defend their special interests against the more disadvantaged workers than fight side by side with them for improvements for the whole class. This is because the supposed special interests of this layer of the working class are represented by the trade union leaders and are therefore supported by them. In reality, however, even the better-off workers ultimately have much more to gain from a consistently militant workers' movement than from the short-sighted insistence on advantages resul-

ting from their relative better position.

Trade unions are of course not the only form of proletarian mass organization. They are the most important because they organize the workers themselves in the labor process and make it possible to lead the class into strike action, i.e. to interrupt capitalist accumulation to the detriment of capital. This is why the organization of the working class in the factories also plays a decisive role in the revolution.

At the same time, however, the Communist Party must also promote the self-organization of the working class and the masses in other areas, such as in the neighborhood, through sport and culture, in schools and universities, and so on. The various forms of mass organization must be aimed at activating as many people as possible and leading them into the struggle for their interests. Their basis must be the solidarity of the exploited and oppressed.

7.2.2 The role of communists in mass organizations

Communists must be active in the various mass organizations, just as they are in the trade unions. They must fight to play a leading role in the struggles and thus really become the vanguard of the working class. However, being a vanguard does not mean declaring oneself a leader and only reciting party conference resolutions and the tenets of Marxism to the masses. Communists can only earn their role as leaders of the class by taking the lead all struggles, by leading the struggle most consistently, most actively, most exemplary, most consciously in the interests of the whole class.

The strategic goal of communists is, firstly, to bring together the various struggles of the working class and the masses so that they no longer take place side by side in isolation, but flow together, support and inspire each other and are directed against the same enemy. This already implies that the strategic goal is, secondly, that all struggles should be waged on an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist basis, i.e. with the ultimate aim of consigning capitalism and imperialism to the dustbin of history.

Does this goal not contradict the character of the mass organizations as a point of contact for broad masses of the class, across political camps? There is indeed a tension here, but one that inevitably exists and which communists must not shy away from. This tension arises unavoidably from the great task of the class struggle to win over the majority of the working class, which does not yet follow the socialist-communist idea, to this idea. There is no other way to accomplish this task than to fight for the unity of the working class and at the same time to fight for the radicalization of this struggle so that it is directed against the real opponent of the working class. In practice, the challenge for communists is, on the one hand, to consistently place class interests in the foreground, but on the other hand, not to get too far ahead of the class consciousness in its slogans, demands and forms

of action and thus isolate itself. Of course it would be wrong, for example, for a communist to stand in front of the workers in a factory without experience of struggle and without being organized in a trade union and give a flaming speech for revolution. But it is just as wrong to slow down the fighting spirit of the masses and make them settle for one or two concessions when they are actually ready to go on indefinite strike.

The communists' struggle for an anti-capitalist orientation of the trade unions and other mass organizations also means that the trade unions and the popular movement must not take a „neutral" stance on clearly political issues such as the question of government and state power. This opportunist view is usually propagated by social democracy. What the social-democratic leaderships want to achieve with this, however, is in reality no political neutrality of the mass organizations, especially since there can be no such thing. Their aim is to prevent the organized working class from questioning the capitalist system as a whole. It should be satisfied with minor improvements or even just the promise of such improvements and continue to vote for the social democratic party in the next elections. This means that the demand that for trade unions to withdraw from political issues is nothing other than the indirect position that the movement should be a pillar of capitalism. The political „neutrality" of the workers' movement is nothing other than the position of class collaboration. The communists, on the other hand, know that the struggle for the immediate problems of the workers cannot be separated from the struggle for power, but rather the two are interlinked. Only if the movement is prepared to break completely with capital and its system, only then can it consistently defend the interests of the workers, regardless of the well-being of „the company" or „the economic location".

7.2.3 The necessity of the Communist Party in the everyday class struggle

Making the right assessment and finding the right answers for every situation in the class struggle is a task that is too big for any individual. Only a collective with a functioning culture of discussion, in which the different sides and aspects of each issue can be considered and weighed up before a decision made, can guarantee that the best possible course of action chosen in most cases. Especially in trade union and workplace struggles, where the confrontation with the class enemy is more direct than in other forms of mass work, such a collective is unavoidable as a support. An isolated individual fighter may the best of intentions, but in the long he will not be able to resist the various instruments of the enemy, the attempts at integration or blackmail, intimidation and oppression.

All this shows why the Communist Party is an indispensable instrument of the working class in the class struggle. It cannot be replaced by mass organizations. On the contrary, the idea that revolution can be made through revolutionary trade unions, as advocated by the anarcho-syndicalist tendency, is a fundamental

strategic misorientation. It mixes up the necessary organizational separation of revolutionaries on the one hand and the broad masses on the other, as a result of which it can neither develop the revolutionary theory and political programme nor organize the broad masses properly. If there is no CP, as is in fact the case in many countries today, it is also impossible for the individual struggles of the working class to develop into a real class struggle for the seizure of power.

In order understand why the Communist Party is absolutely necessary as a vanguard party, it must be emphasized once again that revolutionary class consciousness or even communist consciousness does not arise by itself. Lenin writes about revolutionary consciousness: „*This could only be brought to them from outside. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation , etc.*“ (Lenin: What is to be done?, LW 5, p. 385f). It is therefore possible for the workers to understand spontaneously, i.e. of their own accord, that they must organize themselves into trade unions and that their situation will only improve through struggle. However, it is not possible for them to understand the entire revolutionary theory of scientific socialism on their own and that only a revolution led by the CP can fundamentally improve their situation. This realization must brought into the class „from outside“. Of course, this „from outside“ should not be misunderstood: The communists are, after all, also part of the working class or have dedicated themselves to its struggle and are therefore part of the class's struggles. But nevertheless, the CP is not identical with the working class. It stands for a higher level of consciousness and tries to spread this consciousness within the class.

7.2.4 Agitation and propaganda

Communists promote the development of class consciousness and the mobilization of the class in the class struggle through the means of agitation and propaganda. Communist propaganda pursues the goal of conveying comprehensive statements of scientific socialism. The primary of propaganda is not to arouse the broadest possible masses, but to correctly convey social and political contexts. Lenin wrote, for example, that „*in dealing with the question of unemployment, the propagandist must explain the capitalist nature of the crises, show the cause of their inevitability in modern society, explain the necessity of transforming this society into a socialist one, etc. In a word, he must convey „many ideas“, so many that only (relatively) few people will immediately adopt all these ideas in their entirety. The agitator, on the other hand, speaking on the same question, will pick out the most familiar and glaring example to all his listeners—e.g. the starvation of an unemployed family, the increase in begging, etc.—and will direct all his efforts towards conveying an idea to the „masses“ on the basis of this well-known fact: the idea of the senselessness of the contradiction between the increase in wealth and the increase in misery; will endeavor to arouse dissatisfaction and indignation in*

the masses about this glaring injustice, while he will leave the complete explanation of the origin of this contradiction to the propagandist". (ibid., p. 423). In contrast to propaganda, agitation therefore does not serve to offer perfect and profound explanations for everything, but is concerned with reaching the masses, taking them along emotionally and them over to the struggle. In practice, however, agitation and propaganda are not mechanically separated from each other and can sometimes merge seamlessly.

7.2.5 The balance of power between the classes

Poor living conditions and also a deterioration for the working class, an aggravation of their problems, therefore by no means automatically lead to the emergence of class consciousness. Communists should therefore not be disappointed if, in a crisis, the indignation of the masses about the bad living conditions and the anti-grassroots policies of the ruling class does not translate into support for the Communist Party and socialism.

It has already been pointed out that under capitalist conditions, the balance of power between the classes is almost always unfavorable to the working class. This is precisely the stability of the rule of capital and its state. This unfavorable balance of power is also expressed in the fact that the CP, despite enormous efforts, although it already plays a leading role in the decisive struggles and is accepted as a vanguard by large sections of the working class, nevertheless exerts comparatively little influence and is only openly supported by a minority. This is because it is a big step for most workers to openly declare their support for communism or even just for the Communist Party. The development of class consciousness is not only determined by economic misery, but by many more factors, such as cultural aspects, family influences, particular experiences, etc.

Only in a revolutionary situation, in which the rule of the bourgeoisie has already been decisively weakened and therefore the revolutionary seizure of power becomes possible, only in this situation is the balance of forces no longer clearly in favor of the ruling class, but also not yet clearly in favor of the working class. The CP must prepare itself and the broadest possible sections of the class for this situation. A balance of power in favor of the working class cannot exist at all under capitalism, but only after the bourgeois state has been overthrown and the means of production have been socialized. Only then will the working class the means to secure and defend its rule by all necessary means.

Working questions

- **What does it mean that the CP is a workers' party? What does it not mean?**
- **What are the tasks of communists in the trade unions and other mass organizations?**

- **According to Lenin, what is the difference between agitation and propaganda?**

Discussion questions

- **Is it right that it is the task of communists to politicize industrial struggles? Can this not lead to distancing oneself from the masses because they are not yet able to recognize the connection between wage issues and political issues?**
- **Should the trade unions and other mass organizations be organs of the Communist Party, or independent of it? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of each?**

8 Opportunism and revisionism

Throughout its history, the labor movement has repeatedly experienced very fundamental disputes about all possible aspects of its worldview. Virtually every one of the basic tenets of Scientific Socialism has been challenged at some point either by sections of the labor movement or by others. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with this. After all, Marxism is not a dogma and it must face up to scientific debate. Skepticism is always part of this process. Marxism is also not a „finished" theoretical system to be memorized, but is constantly evolving, which can also mean that certain convictions are abandoned and new ones adopted.

8.1 Opportunism and revisionism

8.1.1 What are revisionism and opportunism?

But does that mean that scientific socialism can be changed at will, that every change automatically a further development? Of course not. In history, there have been numerous theoretical approaches that claimed to extend Marxism, to adapt it to today's conditions or something similar, but which in reality left the ground of Marxism. This kind of falsification of Marxism, the abandonment of the theoretical and practical principles of Marxism, is called revisionism. Revisionism means that the world view of the working class, i.e. scientific socialism, is undermined by incorporating elements of bourgeois ideology. There are numerous examples of this. Already Marx and Engels grappled with various views that stripped socialism of its scientific basis and wanted to return to a utopian understanding of socialist politics.

It is therefore clear that revisionism always leads to different political conclusions than Marxism. Because revisionism undermines the strict scientific basis of communist politics, it inevitably leads to misorientations that start from false assumptions and therefore also come to false practical conclusions that do not serve the working class. We call the practical politics that originate from revisionist views opportunism. Opportunism means choosing a supposedly easier, because more direct, faster or less sacrificial path in the class struggle, which in reality only creates new obstacles to achieving the goal of the complete liberation of the working class and the abolition of all forms of exploitation. A rough distinction can be made between two basic directions of opportunism, which are seemingly opposed to each other but often merge in practice: Left-wing and right-wing opportunism.

8.1.2 Marx and Engels' struggle against opportunism and revisionism

The confrontation with opportunism and revisionism has thus accompanied the labor movement since the very beginning of its development. Throughout their lives, Marx and Engels criticized the opportunist currents in the labor movement of their time. In 1875, for example, Marx wrote a sharp critique of the program of the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (SAPD), in which he attacked the false economic views, vague statements and illusory political goals represented therein (Critique of the Gotha Program, MEW 19, pp. 13-32). Marx wrote his important pamphlet „Misery of Philosophy" as a critique of the teachings of the anarchist theorist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and his work „Philosophy of Misery". Marx and Engels also criticized the doctrine of Louis-Auguste Blanqui, according to which the revolution had to be made not by the working class but by a small clique of conspirators. They fought against the influence of Ferdinand Lassalle and his Prussian nationalist, bourgeois pseudo-socialism in the German workers' movement. They fought against the anarchism of Mikhail Bakunin and his followers in the First Workers' International.

8.1.3 Opportunism and revisionism in the imperialist era

However, with the transition to the imperialist era at the end of the 19th century, the fight against opportunism and revisionism gained even more momentum. In the leading imperialist countries, a class of better-off workers increasingly emerged, the so-called labor aristocracy, which still exists today. Thanks to its enormous extra profits, monopoly capital is able to offer this class better working and living conditions. Due to its relatively better position, this stratum became susceptible to the opportunist theory that the working class could achieve a good life in the long term through compromise, even without a consistent class struggle for the conquest of power. In addition, a bureaucratic leadership of the working

class emerged, especially from the ranks of the labor aristocracy, the so-called labor bureaucracy. These were functionaries of the socialist workers' parties of the time, in Germany the SPD, as well as the trade unions. After social democracy and other labor movement organizations were legalized in Germany at the end of the 19th century, they also received the financial means to fund a workers' bureaucracy in the long term based on their mass influx from the working class. Of course, not all labor leaders at the turn of the century were opportunists and traitors to the class interests of the proletariat; on the contrary, the German labor movement also produced such outstanding revolutionary personalities as Rosa Luxemburg, Karl and Wilhelm Liebknecht, Franz Mehring and Clara Zetkin. But there were also others who fomented reformist illusions and stood for cooperation with the state and the capitalists.

In Germany, for example, the social democratic leader Eduard Bernstein launched a general attack on Marxism at the end of the 19th century. He questioned the necessity of the revolutionary break, which in turn could only be justified by a false understanding of the development of capitalism and a bourgeois understanding of the state. For the Marxist analysis, according to which the state is an organ of class rule, cannot be reconciled with the idea of simply taking it over by way of reform, through a parliamentary majority. One must consider the state to be an inherently neutral area in order to assume that the workers' movement can simply take it over, Bernstein also fundamentally questioned dialectics, materialism and the labor theory of value. This is no coincidence: in scientific socialism, fundamental philosophical viewpoints, economic analysis and political conclusions are closely . Anyone who only wants to accept one part of Marxism and reject the rest inevitably becomes entangled in logical contradictions.

The SPD had gradually developed from a revolutionary workers' party to opportunist positions, with people such as Eduard Bernstein, Karl Kautsky and later Friedrich Ebert and Gustav Noske gaining more and more influence. In 1914 and 1918/19, the German working class had to bear the bitter consequences: in 1914, it became clear at a stroke that the SPD had already defected to the other side of the class struggle. When the imperialist war broke out, the SPD leadership wrote off all its earlier promises that it would take energetic action against war and militarism in the event of war. Instead, it supported the war and sent the working class to the battlefields to kill and murder the workers and peasants of other peoples. When the working class had had enough of the slaughter in 1918 and took up the fight for revolution, for a socialist soviet republic of Germany, it again found the SPD leadership on the other side. SPD leaders Ebert and Noske worked together with the Freikorps, the forerunners of the later fascist movement massacre working class leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht as well as thousands of revolutionary workers. The communists drew the lesson from this that the reformists ultimately become enemies of the working class, consistent advocates of counter-revolution, and must therefore wage a constant struggle against the workers' movement.

Since then, there have been many other examples of how Marxism has been distorted by revisionist views, emptied of its scientific character and revolutionary consistency. Lenin and the Bolsheviks in Russia waged a constant struggle against the opportunist theories in the international workers' movement, especially those of the Mensheviks in Russia, who were opposed to the building of a revolutionary cadre party and held the view that in Russia the bourgeoisie must first fully develop capitalism before socialism was possible. But Lenin also fought against the influence of Kautsky, who spread the thesis that imperialism was capable of peaceful development and who also rejected the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia.

The founding of the Communist parties after the October Socialist Revolution in Russia was a consequence of the opportunist labor leaders' betrayal of the revolution and proletarian internationalism. The consistently internationalist and revolutionary forces drew the conclusion after the war that an independent party of communists was necessary to fight opportunism and revisionism and lead the working class in the struggle for revolution. The founding of the KPD at the turn of 1918/19 was an enormous milestone in the history of the German workers' movement, as the working class finally had its own party again—a party based Marxism that fought to bring the working class to power. But the struggle for a correct revolutionary line did not end there. In the KPD, too, there were years of disputes with deviations that contributed to serious mistakes in the party's policies and hampered the party's development for years. The radical left-wing tendencies around Ruth Fischer and Arkadi Maslow, as well as the right-wing opportunist deviation around August Thalheimer and Heinrich Brandler should be mentioned here in particular.

Opportunism does not necessarily mean that the people who pursue an opportunist policy are also opportunists in character, in the sense in which the word is used in everyday language. Sometimes, they are thoroughly convinced and self-sacrificing fighters who want to stand up for the cause of the working class, but have been led astray by revisionist misconceptions. However, this does not mean that the struggle against opportunism and revisionism should be neglected by the communists. It is true that the question of subjective intentions is important for how to deal with individuals who hold opportunistic positions. But regardless of the personal intentions of the individuals involved, opportunism and revisionism cause great damage to the labor movement, as will become clear below. Therefore, the history of the labor movement to this day is a struggle between the various shades of opportunist and revisionist currents and the class-struggle, communist line.

Working questions

- **In which events at the beginning of the 20th century was the SPD's development towards opportunism expressed?**

- **What developments in the working class created the basis for the emergence of opportunist currents?**

Discussion questions

- **On the one hand, scientific socialism must constantly develop further and, in doing so, throw outdated views overboard—on the other hand, opportunistic and revisionist tendencies must be combated. How can we recognize the difference between necessary further developments and revisionist distortions?**

8.2 Right-wing opportunism

The essence of right-wing opportunism is to absolutize the struggle of the working class for small everyday improvements and reforms. Reform demands and tactical maneuvers, which can be quite correct and necessary within the framework of a revolutionary strategy, are torn from the framework of this strategy, i.e. separated from the goal of the revolution, which ultimately abandoned. Eduard Bernstein expressed this openly: „*What is commonly called the final goal of socialism is nothing to me, the movement is everything*“ (Bernstein 1984, p. 201). The labor movement's struggle for reforms in capitalism is thus elevated to an end in itself and socialism as a goal is either abandoned altogether (the more honest variant) or retained as a purely abstract, usually rather vague goal of a just society, which is also to be achieved through gradual improvements. Right-wing opportunism thus leads to reformism, to the de facto or, as in the case of Bernstein, openly expressed abandonment of the revolutionary strategy. As we have seen, reformism is an unrealistic utopia, because there is no path to socialism without the revolutionary overthrow of the state, without the profound transformation of the whole of society through the revolutionary power of the working class.

8.2.1 The strategy of right-wing opportunism

The fact that the right-wing opportunists are abandoning the revolutionary strategy of communism in the name of tactical demands does not, of course, mean that they no longer have a strategy. Tactics are always only a part of strategy and subordinate to it. The strategy of right-wing opportunism consists precisely in reformism, in advocating this or that change to capitalist exploitation, but not in overthrowing the exploitative order itself. Another variant of reformism consists of verbally rejecting capitalism, but at the same time spreading the illusion that it can be overcome step by step through reforms without the for a revolution led by the CP. However, this strategic orientation is now also having a negative impact on the reform struggles, as these are no longer being waged consistently and are now being conducted under false slogans that fuel illusions instead of promoting the development of class consciousness. Those who only want to co-manage and „improve“ the existing capitalist society must, like every bourgeois government,

keep capital accumulation going and promote it. Even without being in government themselves, reformist movements will take care to make only „realistic" demands, i.e. demands that are compatible with capitalism and the successful accumulation of capital and that do not involve cutting too deeply into the profits of the capitalists. They no longer see capital as an irreconcilable opponent, but as a negotiating partner with whom it is better to negotiate „reasonable" compromises instead of mobilizing the working class to fight against it. As a rule, however, these compromises do not bring lasting improvements for the working class because they are not accompanied by a strengthening of class consciousness, a better organization of the class and thus an improvement in the balance of power. On the contrary, these compromises only come about if the working class is already organized to a certain extent and ready to fight. The potential for politicization and radicalization of the workers' movement is then not realized by the reformist leaderships, but prevented.

Since the right-wing opportunists base their entire politics on the illusion that it is possible to solve the problems of the masses within capitalism, they also put forward correspondingly illusory demands and slogans. Instead of calling for the working class itself to take power, they for the formation of a „left-wing" government; instead of fighting for concrete improvements in the workplace, they call for „good work" or „fair wages", as if exploitation itself were not already an injustice. Such illusory demands may initially mobilize and even inspire a section of the workers, but since they must inevitably fail in the face of reality, they do not lead to a better organization of the class, but to disappointment and resignation. They do not support the process of developing class consciousness, in which workers become aware of their own situation, their opponents and the means to change their situation. On the contrary, they entrench false answers to the right questions in the minds of the workers and thus contribute to the preservation of the capitalist order.

8.2.2 The fight against right-wing opportunism

We have already come to know Bernstein as a representative of right-wing opportunism. His position was followed by other leaders of social democracy, as Karl Kautsky in Germany, Alexandre Millerand in France and the former Marxist Georgi Plekhanov in Russia. Their opponents included Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin. In her important 1899 essay „Social Reform or Revolution", Rosa Luxemburg explained the impossibility of the reform path to socialism: „*Whoever therefore the legal path of reform instead of and in contrast to the conquest of political power and the transformation of society, does not in fact choose a calmer, safer, longer path to the same goal, but also a different goal, namely, instead of bringing about a new social order, merely insignificant changes in the old one*". This would also call into question the existence of the workers' movement itself in the long term. For it was clear to Luxemburg „*that without the fundamental basis, the practical struggle would also become worthless and futile, that with the abandonment of the final*

goal, the movement itself must also perish" (Luxemburg 1899).

Right-wing opportunist tendencies were also still present in the KPD in the 1920s. When there was a revolutionary situation in Germany in 1923, the KPD, under the leadership of August Thalheimer and Heinrich Brandler, formed two so-called workers' governments in Saxony and Thuringia together with the SPD. Capitalism was not abolished as a result. However, in 1922 the Comintern considered the formation of such governments to be a possible transitional form of government in order to come closer to the socialist revolution. However, the workers' governments in Germany were later criticized by the Comintern because the KPD leadership around Brandler and Thalheimer had not used their participation in government to arm the working class, but had behaved like a normal government on the basis of capitalism.

Lenin emphasized that opportunism does not simply arise from theoretical mistakes, nor is it simply because the class struggle is too hard for some people and they are looking for a supposedly easier path. Of course these are also the sources of opportunist deviations. But as Lenin pointed out, opportunism in imperialist society arises by law on the basis of the emergence of a labor aristocracy. Because a section of the working class can be better paid through the extra profits of monopoly capital, capital succeeds in largely integrating these workers into the system and keeping them quiet with concessions. A section of the workers' movement is also taken out of the industrial labor process as paid functionaries of the trade unions and reformist parties and won over to class collaboration with the bourgeoisie with better wages and job security. The same applies to many people with a petty-bourgeois background who repeatedly join the labor movement, but whose personal class position does not give them the same prerequisites as the working class to see through the system as a whole, to recognize the fundamental contradiction within it and, accordingly, to fight consistently for socialism.

That is why opportunism cannot be defeated by refuting it theoretically. In the history of the workers' movement, right-wing opportunism has appeared again and again in various forms. Where communist parties underestimated the fight against it or even abandoned it in the name of the unity of the movement, this resulted in devastating defeats for the entire working class. On the other hand, in the history of the communist movement there have always been people who believed they could recognize an opportunist in anyone who held a different opinion on one issue or another. This is of course wrong and divides the communist movement, which is why it is important to use the term opportunism scientifically and not as an argument to kill every dissenting view.

8.2.3 Right-wing opportunism after the Second World War

In the world communist movement, right-wing opposition developed into an

existential threat in the decades following the Second World War. Tendencies in this direction were already recognizable at the end of the war: Many communist parties had gained great mass influence through their leading and sacrificial role in the anti-fascist resistance. However, they were not in a position to combine the successful anti-fascist struggle with the struggle for power. As a result, communist parties in Europe (e.g. in Italy and Greece) failed to take advantage of the revolutionary situation that arose after the war and instead made unacceptable concessions to the bourgeoisie.

In 1956, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held its 20th Party Congress. After Stalin's death, the new General Secretary of the party, Nikita Khrushchev, not only settled accounts with his predecessor, but also led a political change of course. The party congress now decided to strive for a friendly relationship with US imperialism and affirmed the possibility of a parliamentary and peaceful path to socialism. These orientations were adopted by communist parties all over the world and promoted the development of strategic orientations that, instead of aiming at the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, focused on the "democratic" transition through elections and participation in government. In Germany, this strategy was pursued as „anti-monopolistic democracy".

In some Western European countries, but also partly outside Europe, so-called „Eurocommunism" finally emerged in the 1960s as the next stage in the right-wing opportunist degeneration of the Communist parties. Under the guise of respecting „national characteristics", the „Eurocommunists" put forward the thesis that the „model" of the October Revolution was not valid in Western Europe and that a peaceful transition to socialism was possible. Major parties such as the French and Italian CPs now distanced themselves more and more openly from the Soviet Union and the countries of real socialism, propagated cooperation with the ruling class and even argued that NATO could act as a protective shield for the Italian path to socialism. With „Eurocommunism", these parties finally lost their communist and proletarian character and became bourgeois system parties. Consequently, many of these parties dissolved after a few years or lost their mass influence after losing the hard-won trust of the working class. In this way, right-wing opportunism is largely responsible for the fact that most of Europe's major CPs have disappeared today and that the communist movement has to be practically rebuilt in most countries.

Working questions

- **What are the core positions of right-wing opportunism?**
- **What historical examples of right-wing opportunism have there been in the labor movement?**

Discussion questions

- **How can a Communist Party protect itself from right-wing oppor-**

tunist influences?

8.3 Left opportunism

In addition to right opportunism, there is also left opportunism, which is also nourished by revisionist views of the world and represents a constant problem for the workers' movement. The core of left opportunism, or left radicalism, consists in neglecting the requirements of organizing the masses in the name of the revolutionary goal. This expressed by neglecting or even rejecting struggles for improvements in living conditions and conditions of struggle, or rejecting tactical maneuvers such as alliances and compromises on principle. In the name of the purity of the revolutionary goal, the level of consciousness of the working class is no longer taken into account in practical work. Slogans are put forward and carried into the class which can only meet with incomprehension and rejection because they are far ahead of the development of class consciousness. While right-wing opportunism, for example, means that trade union and workplace struggles are limited to moderate workplace demands and the workers' movement does not pursue any further-reaching political goals to overthrow capitalism, left-wing opportunism represents the opposite extreme. An example of left-wing radicalism would therefore be to place every struggle in the workplace under the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat or not to talk about the daily problems of the workers at the works meeting, but only about the necessity of socialist revolution.

Left-wing radical tendencies can be found again and again in the labor movement. They often emerge as a misguided reaction to right-wing opportunism or as a reaction to particularly repressive phases of bourgeois rule. For example, the rejection of the revolutionary struggle by the reformists can lead to more radical currents in the workers' movement looking for supposed „shortcuts" to revolution out of revolutionary impatience; the seemingly overwhelming influence of social democracy in the trade unions can lead to communists leaving the trade unions and founding „pure" communist trade unions instead, which often only means leaving the field to the right-wing opportunists without a fight and isolating themselves from the working class. Left opportunism is when such a step is taken in order to avoid the arduous battle for the minds of the reformist-influenced workers and thus take a supposedly easier path.

8.3.1 Lenin's fight against left-wing opportunism

In 1920, Lenin dedicated his famous essay „Left-Wing Radicalism, the Infantile Disease of Communism" (LW 31, pp. 1-91) to the confrontation with left-wing radicalism. Some of his criticisms of the „ultra-left" currents in the labor movement in some countries at the time remain relevant today. Among other things, the left-wing radicals were of the opinion that it was wrong for communists to work in trade unions with reactionary leaderships and to take part in elections to the bourgeois parliament. They were of the opinion that any form of compromise

would only be a departure from the path to communism and should therefore be rejected. They also rejected the use of legal methods of struggle because they saw this as an adaptation to the capitalist legal system. Lenin sharply opposed these views: „*Not to work in the reactionary trade unions means to leave the insufficiently developed or backward masses of workers to the influence of the reactionary leaders (...)*" (ibid., p. 38). On the contrary, it was necessary to work in the trade unions under all circumstances in order not to lose contact with the workers organized in them. He also spoke against the founding of „pure" communist trade unions, in which consent to the dictatorship of the proletariat would be a prerequisite for membership. This would exclude the mass of workers and leave them to the influence of their political opponents.

There were also strong radical left-wing tendencies in the KPD in the early years. In 1919, the first year after the party was founded, there was a majority in favor of boycotting the elections, which is why the KPD decided not to stand in the elections. The reason given for this was that parliament was a capitalist institution and the communists were therefore not allowed to participate in it. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg criticized this stance and also prevailed in the party the following year.

In response to the argument of the radical left communists that parliamentarism was „historically finished", Lenin replied that it was not a question of what the communists considered „finished", but whether the masses also considered parliamentarism to be finished. And since large sections of the people still had illusions in parliament, the communists had an obligation, „*to soberly examine the actual level of consciousness and maturity of the whole class (and not only its communist vanguard), of the whole working masses (and not only their most advanced representatives)*". Which is why „*participation in the parliamentary elections and in the struggle on the parliamentary tribune is an unconditional ‚duty' for the party of the revolutionary proletariat, precisely in order to educate the backward strata of its class, precisely in order to rouse and enlighten the undeveloped, huddled, ignorant masses in the countryside.*" (ibid., p. 44).

The communists had to „consistently and completely recognize the need to be extremely flexible in their tactics in all countries" (ibid., p. 89). They must also be prepared to make compromises if these serve the goal of socialism. Communists and their leadership must therefore have the necessary tact to assess which compromises are necessary in the class struggle and will advance the workers' movement and which compromises are in reality a submission to the goals of the opponent. They must be fundamentally willing and able to use both illegal and legal methods of struggle. While the one-sided rejection of all illegal methods is a form of right opportunism, the fixation on illegal methods is left radicalism. Both lead to the Communist Party becoming incapable of leading the working class under all conditions.

After the radical left-wing position of boycotting elections was pushed back in

the KPD, the party turned to right-wing opportunism in 1923 under Thalheimer and Brandler (see Chapter 8.1). However, this leadership was dismissed again in 1924 and replaced by the radical left-wing leadership around Ruth Fischer, Werner Scholem and Arkadi Maslow. While other comrades in the party leadership, such as Ernst Thälmann and Wilhelm Pieck, argued that the KPD should seek joint action with the social democratically influenced workers and also focus on work in the SPD-dominated trade unions, such an approach to the masses was torpedoed by the radical left-wing party leadership. The Comintern now intervened with a criticism of the left opportunism of Fischer, Maslow and Scholem, whereupon they lost the majority in the leading bodies of the KPD in August/September 1925.

Lenin sees the social basis of left-wing radicalism in the petty bourgeoisie, whose existence is constantly threatened by capital. He argues, „*that the small proprietor, the petty proprietor (...), because under capitalism he is exposed to constant oppression and very often to an incredibly blatant and rapid deterioration in the standard of living and to ruin, easily falls into extreme revolutionism, but is incapable perseverance, organization, discipline and steadfastness.*“ (ibid., p. 16). A similar attitude is most likely to be observed today among students and academics, who are often also not secure in their social position, but who lack the experience of discipline and organization in the workplace. As Lenin noted, such left-wing radical excesses are often short-lived and can „*quickly turn into servility, apathy and fantasy*“ (ibid., p. 16f). One challenge to channel the radicalization of these people into fruitful and organized channels and thus make them useful for the struggle of the working class.

8.3.2 Other examples of left-wing opportunism

In history, radical left-wing elements were often found in anarchist groups or the Narodniki („People's Movement“) movement in Tsarist Russia. Some of these propagated individual terrorist attacks against representatives of the system instead of organizing the working class for a social upheaval. Anarchism or „council communism“ also rejected the seizure of power by the working class in the socialist revolution, the leadership of the Communist Party and the establishment of a workers' state because they reject any form of state on principle. Anarchists therefore do not the necessary laws social development and class struggle; they deny the necessity of the working class consolidating and defending its revolution and needing a state apparatus to do so. After the October Revolution, Leon Trotsky and his followers also advocated partly left-opportunist positions. When fascism was on the rise in large parts of the world in the 1930s, Trotsky, for example, the Soviet Union's attempts to build an alliance against the fascist Axis powers (above all Germany, Italy and Japan) through compromises with the non-fascist bourgeois states. these attempts failed due to the refusal of the Western capitalist states, the Soviet Union had to secure itself with a non-aggression treaty with the fascist German Reich in 1939 in order to avoid war for the time being. Trotsky

also rejected this compromise and defamed the Soviet leadership as Hitler's lackeys. However, the position of rejecting virtually all foreign policy compromises would only have led to the international isolation of the Soviet Union and, in the worst case, would have led it into a two-front war against fascist Germany and the Japanese Empire without allies.

The Communist Party of China and the Party of Labor of Albania, two Communist parties that had led successful revolutions in their countries, also shifted to left-opportunist positions in the 1960s. Increasingly, they made their criticism of the right-opportunist deviation of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union at the 20th Party Congress absolute. In the second half of the 1960s and in the 1970s, Albanian and Chinese representatives then fundamentally denied the socialist character of Soviet society as a whole and defamed the Soviet Union as a „social-imperialist superpower", in some cases even as a „fascist dictatorship". They based this on revisionist theoretical views: By labeling a country in which social ownership of the means of production and a centrally planned economy still prevailed as capitalist and even imperialist and „fascist", they completely rejected the Marxist understanding of capitalism and imperialism. At the same time, the thesis of „social imperialism" is also a good example of how left-wing and right-wing opportunism often lie close together and lie into one another. Based on this position, the Chinese Communist Party under Mao Tse-tung adopted an increasingly hostile stance towards the other countries of the socialist camp and, from the early 1970s, finally entered into a foreign policy alliance with US imperialism against the Soviet Union. From then on, the People's Republic of China supported reactionary and counter-revolutionary forces all over the world against the anti-imperialist and revolutionary liberation movements, simply because they were supported by the Soviet Union. From the standpoint of a false left-wing radical criticism of real existing socialism, a pro-imperialist, right-wing foreign policy was thus pursued. In West Germany and other countries, it was often student circles (many of the so-called „K-groups") among whom this ostensibly „ultra-left", but in reality right-wing position fell on fertile ground.

Working questions

- **What are the core positions of left-wing opportunism?**
- **What historical examples of left-wing opportunism have there been in the labor movement?**

Discussion questions

- **Is left-wing or right-wing opportunism fundamentally more dangerous for the labor movement? Which variant has historically caused the greater damage? Which is currently the greater problem?**

9 Socialist society

It has now been shown in detail that capitalism creates a broad spectrum of social problems and produces misery, death and inhumane conditions. It has also been shown why the solution to these problems is only possible through the revolutionary overthrow of the rule of the bourgeoisie and the construction of a socialist society. However, the construction of a socialist society is a difficult and complex task that must itself be made the subject of scientific study and the positive and negative experiences of past socialist attempts must be evaluated if it is to be successful.

Marxism basically distinguishes between two phases of socialist or communist society: the first, immature phase of the new society is also referred to as socialism. The developed socialism, the classless society, is referred to as communism.

9.1 Dictatorship of the proletariat

Before we turn to the question of which economic principles and laws are at work in socialism, we will look at the political forms through which the working class exercises power. For the construction of the socialist mode of production is only possible under the condition of the political rule of the working class. This means that socialism is not only a certain way of organizing production, but also a certain form of the state.

9.1.1 Dictatorship and democracy

The transition from capitalism to a developed communist society cannot, of course, accomplished from one day to the next. It is a relatively lengthy and complicated process of construction, in which there may also be setbacks and detours and which must be defended throughout its duration—against attacks by those forces that lost their power and privileges through the revolution and would do

anything to regain them. In this phase of development, the political rule of the working class must therefore be in a position not only to organize and guide the process of construction, but also to fend off all attempts to undermine and damage socialism. Marx writes: „*Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. This also corresponds to a period of political transition, the state of which can be nothing other than the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*“ (Critique of the Gotha Program, MEW 19, p. 28).

The nature of every state is determined by which class holds power within it. The class character of the state also goes hand in hand with the political and programmatic orientation that the state pursues. While the bourgeois state secures the rule of the bourgeoisie and strives for the successful accumulation of capital and the strengthening of the position of its respective national capital, the socialist state pursues the development and ever more complete implementation of the socialist mode of production. The revolution is therefore not finished with the seizure of power by the working class, but is only the beginning of the overthrow of social relations: „*This socialism is the permanent declaration of revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary point of passage to the abolition of class distinctions in general, to the abolition of all relations of production on which they based, to the abolition of all social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the overthrow of all ideas that emerge from these social relations*.“ (Marx: Class Struggles in France, MEW 7, p. 90).

In the classics of Marxism, the state in the transitional phase of socialism is therefore referred to as the „dictatorship of the proletariat“. But why dictatorship? This term is not normally used positively in bourgeois discussions, but is equated with arbitrary rule, human rights violations and an excessive concentration of power in one person. Many people see the term dictatorship as the opposite of democracy.

Of course, the dictatorship of the proletariat is not at odds with democracy. On the contrary, as we shall see, it is the most democratic system that has ever existed. The term „dictatorship“ is used in Marxism for political rule in general. As has been shown, every bourgeois state, including the bourgeois-democratic republic, is in substance a dictatorship of the capitalist class. For the essence of the bourgeois state is that it serves the rule of capital, defends it by force and, in doing so, neither the working class nor the petty bourgeoisie in its rule. The socialist state, on the other hand, is a dictatorship of the working class in that sense, that the working class is the ruling class and that it prevents the old, overthrown ruling class from regaining power and restoring capitalism.

In relation to the former exploiting class and its supporters, who are no longer in power as a result of the revolution and can no longer exploit anyone, the socialist state is in fact a dictatorship. It defends the rule of the working class by restricting the old capitalist class from spreading its propaganda, organizing itself politically

and taking action against the power of the working class. The same applies to people who do not belong to the bourgeoisie but who politically a return to capitalism, i.e. the interests of the bourgeoisie. If the members or representatives of the former bourgeoisie organize to overthrow socialism, they will be breaking the law and the state will resort to repressive measures. This may mean that the police and courts will deal with the problem. In the Russian Civil War, which the old ruling class started after the October Revolution, it meant a military conflict in which the newly founded workers' state used the revolutionary army against the counter-revolutionary uprising. The exact forms in which this repression takes place depend on the circumstances and, above all, on the means of struggle used by the class opponent against the socialist state.

9.1.2 Freedom and oppression

Doesn't this mean that the dictatorship of the proletariat is opposed to freedom? Yes and no. Yes, because the freedom of the bourgeoisie to fight socialism is actually being a stop to. No, because for the vast majority of the people, this is precisely what creates a completely new kind of freedom: the numerous repressions of the bourgeois state, which were directed against the working class and the people, are a thing of the past. For the first time, the masses of the people were able to discuss all questions of political and social life really freely and decide on them jointly and democratically. Above all, however, they are no longer subject to and at the mercy of the blind laws of capital accumulation, but they themselves determine the structure of the new society.

It is therefore not at all correct claim that the dictatorship of the proletariat is a system of oppression, spying and paternalism over the people. Rather, the core of the dictatorship of the proletariat is an enormous expansion of democracy for the masses. Marx writes about such a state: „*Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class should represent and crush the people in parliament, the general right to vote should serve the (...) people, just as the individual right to vote serves the other employer to employ workers, supervisors and bookkeepers in his business.*" (Marx: The Civil War in France, MEW 17, p. 340). And Lenin: „*The dictatorship of the proletariat, the period of transition to communism, will for the first time bring democracy to the people, to the majority, but at the same time it will necessarily keep down a minority, the exploiters. Only communism is capable of offering a truly complete democracy, and the more complete it is, the sooner it will become dispensable, the sooner it will die out of its own accord.*" (Lenin: State and Revolution, LW 25, p. 476f).

9.1.3 The organs of workers' power

However, in order to realize such a socialist democracy, many prerequisites must be fulfilled, some of which can only created gradually. Because real democracy does not simply mean casting a ballot every few years, but affects the entire or-

ganization of society, the creation of workers' democracy is not a one-off act, but a lengthy process of development. The development of proletarian democracy requires increasing initiative on the part of the workers and a growing awareness that the socialist state is their state. Proletarian democracy also requires that workers develop the technical skills necessary to administer state affairs, from the lowest to the highest levels of the state—and, conversely, that the activities of state administration be simplified, if possible, so that ordinary workers can quickly learn and carry them out. Proletarian democracy presupposes that the working class and the broad masses of the people have comprehensive opportunities to express their opinions, criticize grievances and undesirable developments and organize public discussions. And finally, it also presupposes the establishment of organs of workers' and people's power at all levels, in which the masses discuss and make important decisions and elect their representatives.

In the dictatorship of the proletariat, such bodies do not only decide on state affairs in the narrowest sense, i.e. the drafting of laws, the administration of state institutions, etc. Such bodies can also be formed in residential blocks or neighborhoods, at schools and universities and in the workplace. Such bodies can also be formed in residential blocks or neighborhoods, at schools and universities and in the workplace. The formation of councils in the workplace is of central importance. This is because far-reaching decisions are in the workplace that affect the organization of production, working conditions and living conditions in a broader sense. In the past, a large part of social life was organized in social countries via the companies, from social security to cultural events and vacation opportunities. However, workplaces are also in themselves places of close exchange between workers, where people know each other, depend on each other and can build trust. They are therefore the „natural" place where proletarian democracy must begin. In the workplace, the workers therefore elect the representatives to the next higher bodies whom they trust most to represent their interests.

9.1.4 Principles of socialist democracy

The socialist state is built from the bottom up on these basic principles of proletarian democracy, just as all areas of social life can potentially be organized democratically as a result. The essence of proletarian democracy lies not in formal procedures, but in the active participation of the broadest masses in political life, in the most comprehensive self-organization of society, which is made possible by the social ownership of the means of production. The organizational principle of the workers' state, as in the Communist Party, is democratic centralism: in the state, too, the most important decisions are taken centrally, because only this enables the participation of all citizens. This does not mean that decisions are not also made in individual regions, cities or companies that affect these units, e.g. questions of working conditions in a particular company or the promotion of the language of a national minority living in a particular area. But decisions that affect everyone must be made centrally, because only then will everyone have the

opportunity influence them directly or indirectly. Decisions are therefore discussed comprehensively and made democratically. Once made, however, decisions are binding.

More important than the election itself, however, is the comprehensive discussion of the issues at hand and the suitability of the various candidates for the position to be filled. If this discussion is conducted properly, in many cases it is possible to agree on a result without a vote and determine the best candidate even without an election. Of course, the workers still have the right to hold their elected representatives accountable for their actions at any time and, if necessary, to vote them out of office and fill the position with a new candidate. Special tasks and functions in the socialist state should be filled by the most suitable and selfless individuals from the people and not by careerists and opportunists. In order to prevent this, these tasks should, as a rule, only be remunerated with an ordinary salary and not bring any material benefits. The principles of eligibility for election and deselection at any time, as well as open criticism and self-criticism, also that functionaries are constantly monitored from below. This is also the only way to prevent bureaucratic behavior from creeping in, in which political problems are only solved through authoritarian acts from above instead of through joint discussions and involvement of the masses.

In Chapter 5 on the bourgeois state, it was explained that bourgeois democracy purports to be based on the principle of the „separation of powers". In socialism there may of course also be special institutions that take care of the various tasks, e.g. police authorities, courts, etc. There are also rules and norms that are laid down as laws and which the state organs must adhere to. In principle, however, all these institutions are supervised by the organs of people's power and are accountable to them. This means that the organs of people's power both enact laws and make and implement decisions. There is therefore no separation of powers as in the bourgeois-liberal constitutional theory. This reflects the fact that the fundamental interests of the working class and the broadest masses of the people have a unified character and are to be enforced by the elected representatives of the people. In socialism, the abuse of power and the independence of functionaries are not combated by the functionaries controlling each other, but by the fact that they are constantly controlled from below, i.e. by society as a whole.

9.1.5 Allies of workers' power

Capitalist society consists not only of workers and capitalists, but also of various strata of the petty bourgeoisie, larger and smaller peasants, etc. These strata can and must also be won over to socialism to a large extent. These strata can and must also be won over to socialism to a large extent. So why do we speak of the dictatorship of the proletariat? Does this mean that these strata are excluded from the organs of proletarian democracy, that they are not allowed to take part in discussions and decisions? Of course not. However, the existence of these strata,

which are based on private ownership of the means of production on a smaller scale, is not envisaged in the long term under socialism. And the ideological influences resulting from private property, e.g. efforts to defend small-scale property, to expand commodity relations, etc., must not be allowed to prevail. The proletarian character of the workers' state is demonstrated by the fact that, although it treats non-proletarian strata and classes as allies and them in the democratic processes, it simultaneously places the interests of the working class and its struggle for the deepening of communist relations of production in the foreground.

9.1.6 The Communist Party in the dictatorship of the proletariat

This leading role of the working class is also realized under socialism through the leading role of the Communist Party. What is the leading role of the party under socialism? From what has already been said about socialist democracy, it follows that socialism cannot simply be a dictatorship of the party. The Communist Party cannot therefore exercise power instead of the working class, but the working class itself must exercise this power. Even Stalin, who had been accused by the anti-communist propaganda to have replaced the rule of the working class with that of the party, warned against such an understanding: „*If, therefore, one speaks of the dictatorship of the party over the class of proletarians and equates this dictatorship with the dictatorship of the proletariat, one is saying that the party must not only be a leader, not only a guide and teacher, but also a kind of state power that uses force against its class*". *However, to believe „that the authority of the party can be built on force" was „absurd and completely incompatible with Leninism*" (Stalin: On the Questions of Leninism, SW 8, p. 37f).

Marx, Engels and Lenin intensively studied the experiences of the Paris Commune of 1871, which they saw as the first historical example of a dictatorship of the proletariat, albeit a short-lived one. The revolution broke out as a result of a mutiny by the troops of the National Guard in Paris, who took power after weeks of clashes, but quickly handed it over to the newly elected Council of the Commune. In the 72 days that the Paris Commune existed, the council decided on a series of immediate measures such as limiting the salaries of civil servants, capping the price of bread, waiving outstanding rents, etc. The Commune failed. One of the reasons was that the most conscious revolutionary sections of the French working class lacked the appropriate organization. Unlike the Russian Bolsheviks in 1917, they did not have a disciplined, battle-hardened cadre party with roots throughout the country. The uprising therefore remained limited to Paris, was partially unclear in its orientation and did not take decisive enough action against its enemies. The result was a terrible bloodbath that the victorious counter-revolution inflicted on tens of thousands of Parisian workers. So we see that the programmatic orientation of the workers' movement towards fighting for the dictatorship of the proletariat was not given from the outset, but only developed in this clarity in the course of the class struggle, through the evaluation of expe-

rience. The second central experience that contributed to the sharpening of the understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat was the October Socialist Revolution of 1917. Here, for the first time in history, the working class experienced being in power for a longer period of time, having to defend power in a revolutionary civil war and having to tackle the construction of the new classless society. The Bolsheviks and, in the years that followed, the world communist movement were now able to draw their conclusions from the problems and challenges posed by socialist construction.

Above all, historical experience has confirmed that the dictatorship of the proletariat is not possible in the long term without the leading role of the Communist Party. Even the mass organizations and organs of socialist democracy, through which the masses build socialism, do not as a rule arise by themselves and do not acquire a revolutionary orientation by themselves, but their creation must be decisively driven forward by the Communist Party. Of course, the CP also participates in the exercise of power in the dictatorship of the proletariat. It does this by having its members and cadres participate in the organs of workers' and people's power and run for office. Only when the communists prevail after extensive discussion does it become clear whether they have done a good job and whether the party's policies are really supported by the masses. In socialism, too, the leadership of the party cannot imposed on the masses, but must be accepted by them.

Even in the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Communist Party has the task of organizing the most conscious, most advanced section of the working class (and also other strata, insofar as they adopt the world view of the working class). It anchors itself in the masses, in the workplaces and neighborhoods and spreads Marxism-Leninism as widely as possible in society. Of course, the conditions for this are much more favorable under socialism than under capitalism, where communists have to reckon with constant persecution and countermeasures by the bourgeoisie. Under socialism, the CP fights for the working class to organize itself and its rule better and better; it fights for the deepening of socialist relations in the economy and society, for the repression of the remnants of capitalism and for progress towards a communist society. It is the place where the collective experience of the party and the class continues to be collected and evaluated, thereby constantly developing scientific socialism. It is thus also the center of the ideological struggle against opportunism and revisionism, whose influence hinders socialist construction and which must therefore be pushed back through patient and scientific persuasion and education. In the dictatorship of the proletariat, the working class may have won for the time being, but its opponents have not yet disappeared. „They have retained their international base, the international capital of which they are a branch. To some extent they have retained certain means of production, they have retained money, they have retained widespread social connections. Their resistance has become a hundred times, a thousand times stronger precisely because of their defeat. (...) The class struggle of the overthrown exploiters against the victorious vanguard of the exploited, i.e., against the proletariat, has become incomparably more bitter." (Lenin: Economics and

Politics in the Epoch of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, LW 30, p. 99f). The class struggle has thus not ended with the provisional victory of the revolution, but is even intensifying, even if there are already many achievements for the mass of the people that make their lives easier.

However, this also means that if the Communist Party distances itself from scientific socialism, if it adopts revisionist positions, then it will be increasingly unable to fulfill its leading role in socialist construction and may ultimately even become an instrument of counter-revolution, of the destruction of socialism. After the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, opportunist positions were increasingly adopted in the party's program and practical policies. The thesis put forward by Maoists, for example, that socialism was abolished in the Soviet Union from this point onward and society took on a capitalist character, is wrong. What is true, however, is a process was started here, at the end of which a group took over the party leadership in the mid-1980s that no longer wanted to further develop socialism, but to destroy it completely, which it succeeded in doing within a few years. This raises the important question for us today of how the fight against revisionism and opportunism can also be successfully waged within the Communist Party under socialism. This challenge be overcome in the future. What is certain, however, is that a close connection to the masses and a lively, functioning democratic centralism will be decisive.

History has also shown that the dictatorship of the proletariat can take different forms in different countries, for example that there were differences in the institutions and mechanisms through which the participation, organization and mobilization of the masses was made possible, or how quickly the socialization of the means of production could progress. However, this does not mean that there can be several fundamentally different „models" of socialism, because even if there are of course always national peculiarities depending on the country, the socialist mode of production also has its general laws, which must guide the construction of the new society everywhere. In the next subchapter (9.2) we will come to the laws of economics in the narrower sense. But the laws of socialism also include the fact that socialist construction dependent on the mass activity, creativity and initiative of the working class and the masses; that the leading role of the Communist Party is a mandatory prerequisite; and that both the Party and society as a whole are organized according to the principles of democratic centralism, because only in this way is free discussion and criticism possible on the one hand, and on the other hand the transformation of all social structures can be implemented centrally.

In the chapter on the bourgeois state, it was also explained that bourgeois democracy is based on the principle of party pluralism. In socialism, on the other hand, there are no irreconcilable conflicts of interest between the different sections of the working class and the people. Of course, there may be divergent special interests or views on various issues, e.g. between workers and peasants. However, these differences can be resolved much better through open discussion or

compromise and do not necessarily require different parties. The only force that has a conflicting interest that is fundamentally incompatible with the interests of the working class is the capitalist class. But an anti-socialist party of the bourgeoisie would inevitably be a center of counter-revolution. It would do everything in its power to overthrow the socialist state and would also be at odds with the capitalist foreign countries in order to bring back the dictatorship of capital and take back all the gains won by the workers. Such a party therefore has no place in the dictatorship of the proletariat. Historically, in the GDR and in other socialist countries, there was nevertheless an alliance of several parties that supported the construction of socialism and therefore worked together with the Communist Party. However, this had to do with the history of the emergence of these socialist states, i.e. with certain historical conditions. In itself, however, such a multi-party system is not absolutely necessary for proletarian democracy, nor is it necessarily more democratic, since the mechanisms of democracy are not realized through the choice between parties, but through the direct mobilization, activity and decision-making powers of the masses.

9.1.7 The construction of socialism in one country

Is it possible to build a socialist society in one country or only after the victory of the revolution throughout the world? Lenin gave a clear answer: „*The unevenness of economic and political development is an unconditional law of capitalism. From this it follows that the victory of socialism is possible at first in a few capitalist countries or even in a single country*." (Lenin: On the Slogan of the United States of Europe, LW 21, p. 345).

The socialist revolution is always the result of a combination of different economic, social and political conditions that differently in each country. It cannot therefore be that socialism will triumph everywhere at the same time. It will therefore be necessary to build socialism in one or a few countries first. Of course, this does not mean that the task of overcoming capitalism worldwide should be neglected. The countries in which socialism has triumphed must become the most important bases of the international communist movement in order to strengthen the struggle against the exploitative system in the remaining capitalist countries and at the international level. The defense of the socialist countries against the international class enemy, i.e. imperialism, and the successful competition with the capitalist countries in the economic, cultural, political and military fields will then have top priority. In particular, as long as the socialist countries are still surrounded by hostile capitalist states, they must give priority to the production of means of production to accelerate technical progress and also invest resources in arms production. To this end, however, the socialist countries must also trade and negotiate with the capitalist and imperialist states and, as a rule, will also try to avoid entering into open military conflicts with them. So here too compromises and concessions to the capitalist opponent will be necessary in order to ensure the survival of socialist construction as a whole. In particular, it is

right and necessary to exploit the contradictions between the capitalist states, to play them off against each other and thus provide the socialist states with as many and as long breathing spaces as possible.

As the intervention of the imperialist countries in the Russian Civil War of 1918-1922 and the fascist invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 show, is not always possible to avoid war against the imperialist states. In Great Britain and the USA, there were also plans for a renewed military invasion of the Soviet Union after the Second World War, but this did not materialize due to the strength of the Red Army. Experience also shows that it is fundamentally possible for a socialist state to survive and develop in a hostile capitalist environment over a long period of time and successfully fend off all enemies.

9.1.8 Three fundamental tasks of the dictatorship of the proletariat

In summary, one can say that the dictatorship of the proletariat must fulfill three basic tasks.

Firstly, it must defend the revolution against its enemies and support the revolutionary movements in other countries.

Secondly, it must win over the entire working class and the toiling masses for socialism as far as possible and involve the masses in socialist construction.

Thirdly, it is about organizing socialist construction and staying the course towards the abolition of classes and the introduction of a communist society.

Which of these three tasks carries the most weight depends on the situation in which the country finds itself. In Russia, the civil war raged in the years after 1918, forced upon the workers and peasants by the supporters of the old tsarist regime. In this phase, the task of military defence of the revolution was paramount, although at the same time, of course, the realization of certain revolutionary transformations and the winning over of the broadest possible sections of the workers and peasants to the revolution were also at stake. After the victory of the revolutionary forces in the civil war, however, the emphasis shifted away from the use of violence towards the creation of socialist social conditions, raising the level of education of the masses, satisfying basic needs, etc. But even in this phase, of course, the need to protect the revolution against external and internal enemies did not disappear. We do not know when exactly the labor movement will once again be faced with the task of building a socialist state. But we do know that socialist construction can only succeed if the positive and negative experiences of history are appropriated, studied and evaluated. One of the tasks of communists is to defend previous attempts to create a socialist society against the hostile attacks of bourgeois anti-communist propaganda. This task is in no way contradictory to the fact that it is also necessary to ruthlessly expose and speak out about the

mistakes made in the process.

With the successful creation of a communist society in its basic structures, the socialist state will gradually lose its importance and functions. Of course, there will still have to be institutions for the administration of the state and the economy and the tasks in this area will also tend to increase. So it is by no means a question of a decreasing degree of organization of society, but on the contrary of society organizing itself better and better and more and more functions of the state being taken over by society itself, i.e. the self-organized working class. The last remnants of the division into classes as well as differences between the sexes and between different nations will disappear and thus an ever greater uniformity and unity of the people in the fundamental development issues of society will emerge. As a result, the oppressive function of the state will be used less and less and will ultimately no longer necessary. Engels writes: „*The intervention of state power in social relations will become superfluous in one area after another and will then fall asleep of its own accord. Government over persons will be replaced by the administration of things and the management of production processes. The state is not ‚abolished', **it withers away.***" (Engels: The Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science, MEW 19, p. 225). In contrast to the anarchist view, Marx, Engels and Lenin therefore assumed that the state could not be abolished immediately as a result of social upheaval, but that it would gradually fade and eventually disappear with the progress towards communism to the extent that its functions and tasks were taken back into society.

Working questions

- **How does Marxism use the term „dictatorship"? How does it differ from bourgeois usage?**
- **What three basic tasks must the dictatorship of the proletariat fulfill?**

Discussion questions

- **What tasks should the Communist Party perform in the dictatorship of the proletariat? Which ones not?**
- **Are party pluralism and the separation of powers really bourgeois institutions or should they continue to be used under socialism?**
- **How can the principles of proletarian democracy be developed and become an everyday way of life?**

9.2 Political economy of socialism and communism

Socialism is the new form of society that emerges from the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Just as capitalist society is determined in its essence by the capitalist mode of production and its political, legal, cultural, ideological and other superstructure arises on the basis of this mode of production, socialism is also determined by the socialist mode of production. The socialist mode of production has its own laws, which differ fundamentally from those of the capitalist mode of production. The fundamental laws of the capitalist mode of production, such as the law of value, the law of surplus value, the concentration and centralization of capital, the necessary emergence of crises and the tendency of the rate of profit to fall are fundamentally no longer valid under the socialist mode of production. What does „fundamentally" mean here? It means that these laws do not result from the socialist mode of production and are in contradiction to it. This does not exclude the possibility that the law of value may still have a certain, albeit limited, effectiveness at a specific point in socialist construction. If this is the case, however, it is a remnant of capitalist society that has not yet been overcome. We will return to the question of the law of value under socialism later.

The laws of the socialist mode of production arise historically and logically from capitalism. The development of capitalism into monopoly capitalism, into imperialism, implies that an enormous degree of concentration, centralization and socialization of production already takes place under capitalist conditions. As the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie are pushed back numerically by capitalist development, society is increasingly divided into its two main classes, the working class and the bourgeoisie. The programme of the socialist revolution now consists of the working class taking over production, which has already been socialized and concentrated to an enormous extent. In this way, the basic contradiction of capitalism between social production and private appropriation is abolished, so that the working class can take over production. Appropriation, i.e. the ownership of the means of production and the products, now also takes on a social character. The social means of production are now used in the interests of society as a whole instead of for the profit of a small minority of capitalists.

Through the revolutionary power of the working class, the means of production are wrested from the hands of private owners, the capitalists, and placed under the control of the workers' state. Bourgeois ideologues therefore often refer to the nationalization of companies under capitalist conditions or even state activities in general (subsidies, taxes, regulations, etc.) as „socialism". Of course, this has nothing whatsoever to do with reality. For under capitalism, the state is the „ideal total capitalist". The bourgeoisie exercises its political rule through the bourgeois state. Precisely because it represents the interests of capital, the bourgeois state must safeguard the processes of capital accumulation and must itself become economically active to this end. Under certain conditions, this can include nationalization. However, these do not serve the construction of socialism and the abolition of exploitation but, on the contrary, the stabilization of capitalism and

thus the maintenance of the oppression and exploitation of the working class. Individual nationalizations do not abolish the laws of capitalism as long the system of private ownership of the means of production, competition and the production of surplus value remains untouched.

There are therefore two fundamentally different types of nationalization: nationalization under capitalism and nationalization as a revolutionary socialist act. The decisive difference is a political one. In the first case, the state is in the hands of the capitalist class and therefore cannot serve to disempower capital. In the second case, state power is already fundamentally different, because it has emerged from the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. The bourgeois state was smashed and a new state of the working class was established. The nationalization of factories, but also of infrastructure, land, forests, etc. no longer serves the smooth running of capitalist production, but the transition to a new social order in which there will ultimately be no more private capital, no more profit, no more exploitation.

9.2.1 Centrally planned economy

The fact that the means of production are now socialized necessarily means that the production and distribution of goods are also centrally planned. There is then only one owner of the means of production, namely society, the socialist state. Under these conditions, production can only be organized on the basis of a plan that aims to meet the needs of society as a whole. These needs of society, its need for consumer goods and the means of production, which are necessary goods that are needed to produce them must therefore be determined before production begins. The planned economy presupposes a complex system of calculations in which not only the demand must be determined in advance, but also which goods are needed in what quantity by each individual branch of production, even each individual company, in order to produce all the required things. Each company is assigned mandatory tasks as part of the overall plan for the socialist economy. The development of information, communication and transportation technologies naturally makes it much easier to draw up and implement such an overall economic plan. The history of the Soviet Union shows that it was already possible at the end of the 1920s to plan the production of an entire society in a huge country and to create the foundations of a modern industry within a very short time. Today, of course, completely different possibilities for efficient economic planning are available and it is to be expected that further possibilities for improving centrally planned economic processes will continue to emerge in the future with the further development of information technology.

The central determination of needs in advance is a difference to capitalism, where such a determination of needs does not take place and it is only possible to determine in retrospect via the market for which goods there was a solvent demand and for which there was not. There is therefore no macroeconomic chaos and necessary imbalances as in capitalism in a planned economy. Crises do not

occur simply because production is geared to needs and not to solvent demand on the market. Mountains of unsaleable goods, as they exist under capitalism, do not even occur. Of course, economic problems are also possible under socialism. However, these are then due to poor planning, incompetence, etc. Unlike in capitalism, they do not occur as a matter of course and can be avoided through prudent policies.

Commodity production occurs in economic forms in which production and consumption are separate, i.e. in which the producers of goods and the consumers of these goods act separately from each other. This is the case in capitalism, as the means of production are private property and the goods are produced for sale, not for personal consumption. In socialism, on the other hand, all enterprises are part of the same economic organism. All enterprises belong to the state, to society as a whole, and are subject to an overall social plan. There is therefore no basis for the enterprises to exchange their products with each other. For even the products are not the property of the individual enterprises, but belong to society as a whole. And, of course, society cannot trade with itself. The companies therefore deliver their products and these are either delivered directly to other companies (if they means of production) or, if they are consumer goods, distributed to consumers.

9.2.2 Wage and performance principle in socialism

As long as society cannot produce an abundance of consumer goods, the distribution of goods must continue to be regulated by a kind of „money". For their work, which contributes to the increase in social wealth, people are allocated an income in accordance with the time they have worked, which them access to a share of social wealth. Marx writes: „*He receives from society a certificate that he has supplied so much labor (after deducting his labor for the common funds), and with this certificate he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as the same amount of labor costs*." (Critique of the Gotha Program, MEW 19, p. 20). These bills, which people under socialism can use to buy the goods they need every day, superficially resemble the money we use to go shopping under capitalism. But they are not money in the capitalist sense, as Marx emphasizes: „*The producers may, for my sake, receive paper instructions for which they withdraw from the social stocks of consumption a quantity corresponding to their labor-time. These instructions are not money. They do not circulate.*" (Capital, Volume II, MEW 24, p. 358). Under capitalist conditions, money circulates freely: it is used to buy a commodity. The seller of this commodity then uses it in turn to buy further commodities and so on. The situation is quite different under socialism: the „money" is paid out by the state to the workers for work performed and the workers return it to the state in exchange for commodities. The workers do not use the „money" to buy goods from other private individuals. And it is certainly not possible to accumulate the „money" as capital by buying means of production with it and running your own business. It merely serves to regulate

the distribution of social goods among individuals.

The „wage" that workers receive under socialism is thus something completely different from the capitalist wage. Under capitalism, workers are „doubly free" because they are both free from ownership of the means of production and free to sell their labor power on the market. Both no longer apply under socialism. Workers are now owners of the means of production, albeit collectively and not individually. And they do not sell their labor power to someone else. The „wage" under socialism is not paid to them by a capitalist, but is again only the form in which the proletarian state organizes the distribution of social wealth among the individuals. This is necessary as long as there is still scarcity and the share that the individual receives from the wealth of society must also be measured according to their individual performance. The constitution of the Soviet Union of 1936 stipulated: „*In the USSR, the principle of socialism is realized: ‚To each according to his ability, to each according to his merit'*". At a later stage in the development of socialism, this will gradually change. Marx writes: „*In a higher phase of communist society*", where „*all the fountains of cooperative wealth flow more fully—only then can (...) society write on its banner: To each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!*" (Marx: Critique of the Gotha Program, MEW 19, p. 21).

Of course, no surplus value is produced under socialism. Investments are made and a surplus is produced. Social wealth grows over time. But this is not surplus value. This is because the surplus does not belong to a private individual, but to society as a whole. It is also not sold, so it does not take on a value form. It is therefore wrong to claim that under socialism the state would simply take over the role of the capitalist, or that this was the case in the Soviet Union or other socialist countries in the past. This is because capitalism only exists through competition between different capitalists who are in constant competition with each other for the highest profits. The socialist state, on the other hand, plans production with the aim of satisfying society's needs in the best possible way; it is not profit-oriented.

9.2.3 Does the law of value work under socialism?

If wages take on a different character under socialism and there is no surplus value, does the law of value, which played a role not only under capitalism but also in earlier modes of production, at least apply under the conditions of socialist production? This question hotly debated in the socialist countries. The positions ranged from the view that the effect of the law of value under socialism was fundamentally „inadmissible" to the view that the law of value must also regulate production under socialism and is therefore still valid in the developed stage of communist society. But let us remember what the law of value is: in a society in which producers produce separately for the market and compete with each other, the law of value regulates exchange relations and the distribution of labor among the various branches of production.

Stalin therefore took a more differentiated position in this discussion: because production in the Soviet Union was not yet fully socialized, i.e. not all means of production were owned by the people and therefore directly subordinate to the central plan, there was still commodity production. This mainly affected the collective farms, whose land and most important means of production were state property, but which were still allowed to sell part of their produce themselves instead of simply delivering it to the state. The law of value continued to play a certain role in determining the prices of these agricultural consumer goods. In foreign trade, too, the products of socialist production naturally continued to the form of goods, as they were produced for a capitalist market.

However, the law of value in the Soviet Union itself did not have the role of regulating production as a whole, because the distribution of labor and resources to the various branches of production and the determination of prices was carried out by the central plan. Stalin also correctly rejected the view of some Soviet economists that the law of value an eternally valid law that would continue to operate under communism (Stalin: Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR, p. 20ff).

In principle, it can be said that the law of value can still have a limited effect under certain conditions in an earlier phase of socialist construction, as long as it is not possible to socialize all means of production and incorporate them into the central plan. Nevertheless, it is a law that is alien to the socialist-communist mode of production and contradicts it. The more the socialist relations of production are consolidated and deepened, the less room there can be for the law of value.

Under socialism, production and the distribution of labor and resources to the various sectors of the economy are not controlled by the law of value, but by a central plan. However, this does not mean that the average working time required by society no longer plays a role as a yardstick. For, as Marx already noted, the law of the determination of labor time also applies in socialism. In capitalism, the socially necessary working time plays a decisive role as a regulator of production via the law of value. In socialism, it is not the law of value that fulfills this role. But here, too, the progress of the productive forces constantly reduces the time needed to produce a certain product. „*Assuming communal production, the determination of time naturally remains essential. The less time society needs to produce wheat, cattle, etc., the more time it gains for other production, material or spiritual. As in the case of a single individual, the universality of its development, its enjoyment and its activity depends on the saving of time.*“ (Marx: Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie, MEW 42, p. 105).

9.2.4 Economic laws of socialism

Does this mean that none of the economic laws that apply under capitalism are valid for socialism? Of course not. Even in a socialist planned economy, production can be divided into the production of means of production (Department I)

and consumer goods (Department II). Marx points out that even under socialism, the departments of production must be developed in a suitable relationship to each other so that the production of each department corresponds exactly to the requirements of the other department and of society as a whole (Marx: Das Kapital, Vol. II, MEW 24, p. 423).

In socialism, too, an expansion of production and a growth in social prosperity initially means an expansion of the production of means of production in order to increase production capacity. The decisive difference to capitalism is that the development of the departments under socialism can take place evenly and in the right proportions thanks to the central plan, whereas under capitalism there must be constant imbalances and thus crises.

An important insight that we can make here is that economic laws also operate under socialism. These laws are also objective, i.e. they exist independently of people's will. How is this to be understood? Is it not the individual who determines his own fate and social development under socialism? Yes, that is correct. But it does not mean that people could therefore shape the socialist structure at will, or that there could be a multitude of possible forms of socialism. Without regularities, social development under socialism would be random and chaotic. It would no longer be possible to analyze it scientifically and intervene to control it. Political economy as a science would therefore no longer have any function. However, certain economic laws also apply to the socialist planned economy, which must be observed by socialist planners if socialist development is not to come to a standstill.

One such law is the above-mentioned proportional development of the departments of production and the priority given to the production of means of production as long as society still suffers from economic shortages and is therefore dependent on constant growth.

So what is the most fundamental economic law of socialism, which determines the direction of social development and on which the other social laws also depend?

According to Stalin, this law is „*to ensure the maximum satisfaction of the constantly growing material and cultural needs of society as a whole through the uninterrupted growth and constant perfection of socialist production on the basis of the most highly developed technology*". (Stalin: Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR, p. 41). He argues that central economic planning, while important, cannot be the basic law of socialism, because it does not in itself say what task this planning has. The orientation of planning towards satisfying people's growing needs, on the other hand, is the fundamental guiding principle of socialist production. Marx also uses a similar formulation: „*The economy of time as well as the planned distribution of labor time among the various branches of production thus remains the first economic law on the basis of collective production.*" (Marx: Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie, MEW 42, p. 105). Marx also sees the constant

progress of the productive forces to better satisfy needs is the fundamental law of socialism.

9.2.5 The two phases of socialist construction

Marxism distinguishes between two phases of development in socialist construction. In the first phase, the new mode of production is still incompletely realized and society is still marked by the remnants of capitalism. Marx writes about this phase: „*What we are dealing with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own basis, but, conversely, as it emerges from capitalist society, i.e. in every respect, economically, morally, spiritually, it is still tainted with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it comes*" (Marx: Critique of the Gotha Program, MEW 19, p. 20). In this phase, the exploitation of man by man has already been abolished and surplus value production and capital accumulation no longer form the driving force of social development. Nevertheless, workers are still remunerated according to the work they perform, as described above. There are still remnants of commodity production in this phase, such as the exchange of goods between collectivized farms and the state. At the beginning, there may even still be small private farms, as it may not be appropriate to socialize them immediately. However, the direction of society's development is towards reducing the extent of commodity production and commodity exchange more and more. The importance of money wages is also declining, as more and more services (such as education, health care, public transportation, sports, culture, social gatherings, etc.) provided free of charge to all citizens by society as a whole. In the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, this principle had already been realized to a high degree and also applied to other needs such as basic foodstuffs, housing and vacations, which were not made available free of charge, but at a greatly reduced price. As a result, social differences, which may of course still exist to a significant extent at the beginning (e.g. between senior employees and ordinary workers), become smaller and smaller and eventually disappear completely. Education will no longer be the prerogative of the ruling class and the middle classes, but all people will increasingly have equal access to it. As a result, the differences between simple, complicated and managerial activities, between manual and mental work, will become less important. Lenin is credited with the statement that, under socialism, every cook must ultimately be able to govern the state. This does not mean that there will no longer be any specialization, as it is of course difficult to imagine being an expert in quantum physics, political economy and heart surgery at the same time. But the exclusive restriction of people to one activity through the choice of profession largely predetermined by the system will be a thing of the past. Instead, the focus will be on the all-round development of the individual.

The further this process progresses, the more the remnants of the outdated capitalist society will lose weight, the more the full potential of human beings will be developed and the differences between rich and poor will disappear, the closer society will come to the point where it can actually be described in full as a class-

less society, as a society of free and equal.

The first phase of the new society is often referred to as the phase of socialism or the dictatorship of the proletariat and the second phase as communism or a classless society. However, the distinction between the two phases cannot be drawn very sharply. For socialism does not represent a different mode of production or a qualitatively different form of society than communism, but only an early, incomplete stage of development of communist society. The transition to a communist society is also not abrupt, like the revolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism, but a gradual transition. A revolution is neither necessary nor possible in the transition to a communist society. This is because the ruling class in the early phase of socialist-communist construction is the working class, which dissolves all other classes in the course of the construction process. The working class is indeed the ruling class, but for the first time in history the ruling class is not an exploiting class, but a class that has set itself the goal of abolishing all exploitation. So there is no longer an exploited class that could overthrow the ruling working class.

9.2.6 Can socialism work? Or is it just an unrealistic utopia?

Finally, a few words on the question of whether socialism can „work". Anti-communist propaganda repeatedly claims that socialism may be a „nice idea", but ultimately it cannot work. Even many people who honestly wish for a different society often ask themselves whether socialism/communism is ultimately an unrealistic utopia. However, this question is already misguided to a certain extent. For capitalism has long since created productive forces that can only develop their full potential under socialism. It already forces workers to cooperate to such an extent that the organization of the work process under the unified command of society would obviously be possible and more efficient. In other words, the planned economy, according to anti-communist ideologues cannot function, already takes place in every capitalist monopoly group—only not in society as a whole and not oriented towards the needs of the people, but towards profit.

The alleged „nature of man", which is so often cited as an argument against socialism, has also already been refuted: For man is always the product of the social conditions in which he lives, so that there is no such thing as a general human nature valid for all epochs. Capitalism causes people's true potential to atrophy and, above all, promotes the basest and most despicable character traits. It is of course true that human beings are capable of unimaginable cruelty and the greatest crimes against their own kind when society develops these capacities in them, as imperialist states and armies, and especially fascism, have always done. The capitalist ideologues would have us believe that man is by nature a loner who seeks only his own advantage and is cruel to his fellow man. But this image of man does not correspond to reality. For even under capitalism, man also strives

to satisfy his material needs, but also his social, cultural and intellectual needs, such as the need for solidarity, friendship, community, etc., all of which can only be inadequately fulfilled under capitalist conditions and call for socialism. Even under capitalism, the labor movement promotes and cultivates solidarity among workers, selfless commitment to one another and to a better society. In a socialist society, where workers no longer experience constant competition against each other, where the focus on building together and mutual help and support, people's consciousness develops in a completely different way. History shows by means of millions of examples that the masses are capable of enormous achievements under socialism: From the voluntary work brigades (e.g. the Subbotnik and Stakhanov movements in the Soviet Union), where workers voluntarily worked harder to accelerate so- cialist construction, to the mass heroism with which millions of workers and peasants defended the Soviet Union against German fascism at enormous sacrifice, or the Vietnamese people fending off the USA as the world's greatest military power.

Socialism is a sensible form of society precisely because it is oriented towards human needs and inclinations, i.e. towards the human nature. Capitalism, on the other hand, shows its irrational character not only through its regular crises. In capitalism, inventions and technical innovations also depend on whether private capital expects to make a profit from them. Large investments that are only worthwhile in the long term are not even made by capitalists because they are concerned with short-term profit, which is why the state has to intervene. And many innovations are even prevented because they cut into profits. It is common knowledge that technical devices are deliberately designed with built-in faults so that they break down after a few years and have to be bought again. In the GDR, on the other hand, almost unbreakable glass was developed, for example, because socialism is putting science in the service of people instead of profit—in this case, this meant producing useful commodities and saving resources the process. After socialism was smashed, however, this invention failed to catch on because the capitalist glass producers had an interest in glass shattering when it fell, so that the market for their goods never dried up.

So while anti-communist propaganda claims that a socially planned economy is economically inefficient, the exact opposite is true. In a planned economy, the latest and best scientific developments and inventions will always be implemented in order to increase labor productivity and reduce resource consumption. Because research and development does not take place individually in each company and is hindered by company secrecy, but tackled by all scientists in the society with united forces, scientific progress accelerates enormously in socialism. Because it is no longer just a small proportion of humanity that has the opportunity to become an engineer or scientist, the pace of scientific progress accelerates enormously under socialism.

If the potential of all people is exploited as far as possible, the number of great and ingenious artists and scientists will also increase significantly.

In its initial phase, the capitalist mode of production massively accelerated the development of the productive forces in comparison to feudalism and other pre-capitalist modes of production. In a similar way, socialism will also unleash the development of productive forces, which is restricted, inhibited and steered in a destructive direction by capitalist property relations, for the benefit of humanity. The capitalist waste of resources through constant crises, the destruction of people and nature, through wars, held-back technical innovations and unproductive and harmful activities (e.g. the activities of financial speculators and financial advisory firms, repressive apparatuses, advertising and market research companies, but also areas such as prostitution, drug and arms trafficking, etc.) will make way for planned work oriented towards socially meaningful goals.

Working questions

- **What is the difference between wages under capitalism and socialism?**
- **What is the difference between money under capitalism and money under socialism?**
- **Why do we speak of two phases of socialism and how do they differ?**

Discussion questions

- **What are the economic laws of socialism? What consequences can there be if these laws are violated? Is it correct that the law of value contradicts the socialist structure?**

The controversy surrounding the law of value under socialism

In the USSR and other socialist countries, the view that the law of value was also a law of socialism increasingly prevailed after the XX Party Congress of the CPSU in 1956. Accordingly, economists and politicians in the socialist countries assumed that commodity-money relations and the pursuit of profit were also not in contradiction to socialism, but could be harnessed for socialism. This was often based on a false understanding of the law of value: it was claimed that the law of value and the exchange of goods for money were a consequence of the division of labor in a developed society. In reality, however, the law of value only arises on the basis of property ownership of the means of production. As Marx has shown, the exchange of commodities always tends to develop towards capitalism. In the socialist countries, too, it became apparent that the existence of small private businesses, even within the framework of a socialist economy, led to the owners of these businesses retaining or developing a bourgeois class consciousness that was directed against socialism.

Stalin fought against such views until his death (1953). In his opinion, the operation of the law of value was incompatible with socialism in the long term and had to be pushed back more and more in favor of comprehensive planning in the course of socialist construction. After his death, however, a comprehensive campaign against Stalin began under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev, which was also accompanied by the rejection of his economic policy positions.

10

Closing words: Build the communist party and a labor movement based on the class struggle!

In this detailed introduction to Scientific Socialism we have now covered the foundations of dialectical materialist philosophy, the Marxist critique of political economy and the conception of the state, as well as the various areas of the theory of class struggle and revolution.

To overthrow all conditions "*in which man a degraded, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being*." (Marx: On the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction, MEW 1, p. 385). This is still the great task of the working class and the communists. Creating a new world, a world without the exploitation of man by man, is not an unrealistic utopia. In the 20th century, there were already societies in various countries around the world in which capitalism had been overcome; societies that were no longer based on exploitation, but on rational, scientific planning of production to satisfy social needs. In the end, these societies were destroyed almost everywhere and capitalism was restored. However, this did not happen because socialism is impossible in itself or because it "contradicts human nature". It came about because of the enormous pressure that imperialism exerted on the socialist camp, but above all because of mistakes that were made by the communists and not corrected. The fact that these mistakes were made, that socialism could be smashed, does not change the fact that the communist idea is more relevant than ever before.

To change this world, we need to organize ourselves. This organization takes place in real life, at the center of life and work, in the neighborhood, in the workplace, in schools and universities. This is where communists must become active and, to a certain extent, merge with the masses. But this struggle cannot be led by any individual, no matter how experienced or well-read someone is. Only as part of a collective, as part of the Communist Party, can this struggle be successful. The most important conclusion, the decisive message of this introduction is therefore:

Organize yourselves! the Communist Party with us! We have a world to win!

In Praise of Communism

What actually speaks against communism?
It is reasonable. You can grasp it. It's simple.
You're no exploiter, so you'll understand.
It is good for you. Look into it.
Stupid men call it stupid, and the dirty call it dirty.

It is against dirt and against stupidity.
The exploiters call it a crime.
But we know,
It is the end of all crime.

It is not madness but
The end of madness.
It is not chaos,
But order.
It is the simple thing
That's hard to do.

Bertolt Brecht

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