



Nahuel Moreno

**Historic Materialism:
Elementary Concepts**

(The Marxist Conception of Society)

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Editor's preface

In June of 1982, a revolutionary mobilization threw out the dictatorship of Galtieri, after his capitulation in the war against Great Britain for the Malvinas. Nahuel Moreno defined it as a revolution. The elaborations of the time can be also be read in www.nahuelmoreno.org:

1982: The Revolution Begins

Argentina: A Triumphant Democratic Revolution

In the summer of 1983-84 the of party cadre's school was held around these subjects. Moreno prepared a "pilot school" that he conducted and was recorded. With the transcription of the same, revised and corrected by the author, a series of booklets were prepared for reading and discussion by the participants. The first was on the basic concepts of historical materialism, and we are incorporating it for the first time to this page. The other texts were published as a book under the title *Revolutions of the Twentieth Century*, which can be found in www.nahuelmoreno.org.

Since 1994 there have been numerous reprints of *Historic Materialism: Elementary Concepts*, with the subtitle *The Marxist Conception of Society*. In those paper editions other fragments of Moreno on these subjects, were included.

The Editors

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Historic Materialism: Elementary Concepts (The Marxist Conception of Society)

Foreword

Until the middle of the 20th Century, there was no scientific description or explanation of how the different societies that had taken place in the past of mankind, or how the society of the time, capitalism, worked, or how the change had happened, i.e., the passage from one society to another, how mankind had been evolving. The main interpretations revolved around the idea that everything was the work and will of God, or the product of some privileged race or nationality, or the great action of great men, or the evolution of ideas.

From the 1840s onwards, Karl Marx together with Friedrich Engels put forth the first materialistic and scientific interpretation of the history of mankind and of the different societies that succeeded each other. Engels, years later, explained in his book *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* that socialism became a science from Marx's two greatest discoveries: the materialist conception of history and the working mechanism of capitalist society. Let us briefly look at how we approach the study of human society from the materialist conception of history.

1. Infrastructure or productive forces

Marx's first assertion is that the fundamental aspect of every society is the relationship men have with nature to produce, how it is their productive work (whether they hunt and fish, or cultivate the land, or install gigantic factories and nuclear power plants). Each animal species — except man — always uses the same means to live, always has the same relation to the environment (or at most has a very limited range of adaptation). The human species, on the contrary, works on nature, drawing more and better raw materials and energy sources, developing more and better tools and techniques to produce more and more wealth.

We call this relationship between men and nature infrastructure or means of production or productive forces. To extract from nature its riches, to exploit it more and better, man with his work disposes the different raw materials, which he alone discovers and exploits, and the different techniques and tools which he alone creates, develops and perfects. The development of the productive forces, which is synonymous with progress in the development of society, happens through changes in some of these elements, mainly in tools and techniques. But in any case, for Marxism, the most important productive force is man himself, since he is the one who creates and moves the tools, develops the technique and works the raw materials.

The development of the productive forces is the main engine of historical progress. We will see, in the historical progress, the changes in the development of the productive forces linked to the emergence of each type of society. But we can take the example of the transition from crafts to manufacturing, in the eighteenth century. The manufacturing capitalists made a change of

technique — with the same raw materials and tools used by individual craftsmen, they grouped workers into large workshops, where each group made a part of the total production that until then had been made by each craftsman. With this change they achieved a large increase in production and opened the way for the emergence of the machine tool and large-scale industry between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th. Later, for example, already in the 20th century, the textile industry took a colossal leap by changing a raw material, when they began to use synthetic fibres (nylon and others). Being stronger than animal or vegetable fibres, it allowed the same machine to work at a much higher speed.

Just as the differences between the different types of societies are explained by the different development of the productive forces, within our capitalist-imperialist world something similar happens with the difference between the countries. The United States is the country of the world with greater development of the productive forces. This is why, for example, the United States has won so many Nobel prizes and Paraguay none (and perhaps never will). It is not that the Americans are a race of geniuses, but they are based on a greater development of the productive forces.

Argentina is today a country totally in decline, when it once ranked fifth in the ranking of countries. This is why we used to have an outstanding participation in the Olympics. Now we have not even won a consolation medal for years. There is one country where the opposite happened: Cuba. Whereas before the revolution they would get nothing, for years now Cubans are getting many medals, even though the United States, the Soviet Union, Germany, and other major countries are still ahead.

2. Structure or production relations

The second fundamental category is internal to society, it is the relationship of men to each other to produce and distribute the products. If infrastructure is the man-nature relationship, external to society, this is the man-man relationship, within the economy of society.

Today, at a glance we see that there are very large differences among men in regard to their labour. There are those who work as beasts of burden, in factories, mills, bars, mines, etc. There are the workers, who work in manufacturing or industry. There are the farmers, who work the land, the landowners who do nothing, who are parasites who live of renting the land. The industrialist who runs or owns the factory. The merchant, who directs the exchange of products, of the goods. The financier, the banker, who directs the movement of money, and lives off his lending. There are those who live on the fringes of the classes, who manage best as they can, the marginalised or lumpen-proletarians. Everything we have just listed describes different situations regarding production and distribution.

Men who have the same relationship with respect to ownership of the productive apparatus and its products form what we call social class (or class sectors).

In class societies there is private ownership of the means of production. The bourgeoisie owns the means of production and distribution (factories, mills, the money, transport, etc.). The landowners own the fields and the mines. The bourgeoisie and the landowners, by right of inheritance, pass their properties to their descendants. The workers have no property and are forced to work for the capitalists, to get a wage with which to survive. The bourgeoisie and the proletariat are the antagonistic and fundamental classes of capitalist society. There are also the landowners, the small owners and the lumpenproletariat.

Contradictorily, although this category of social class is basic to the whole Marxian conception, Marx never defined it or developed it with precision. For example, in the Communist Manifesto, which is one of the first texts in which Marx argues and develops that the history of mankind is the history of the class struggle, there is no definition of what a “social class” is. Forty years later, in one of the many editions of the Manifesto, Engels added a footnote which says: “By bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage

labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live. [Engels, 1888 English edition]

The discussion on the modern middle class

Trotsky pointed out the existence of the “new middle class” characteristic of the imperialist epoch. This necessary precision may lead to confusion if we interpret it as a development, an artificial continuity of the old petty bourgeoisie and not as a new phenomenon. The modern middle class consists not of small independent owners (as it was in Marx’s time), but of salary-earners. The bank employees, commerce employees, teachers, doctors, lawyers, architects, and engineers working for large clinics, studios or construction companies, technicians and advertising employees, entertainment and media (radios, TV, cinema, theatres, etc.), etc.

The existence of this important mass of population, which is paid a wage without being an industrial worker, and which for us is the modern middle class, poses us with the problem of Marx’s definition. In *Capital*, even if he did not make a comprehensive development of the definition, to define the proletariat Marx used as a criterion being a wage-earner. This approach seems to us correct because it was associated with a particular relationship in the production process: they did not own the means of production and they sold their labour power, producing surplus value. On the other hand, from the point of view of the society of his time, the character of wage-earners was practically synonymous with industrial workers, since there were almost no wage-earners who were not workers (industry, manufacturing, rural). The old petty bourgeoisie was essentially made up of small urban or rural owners.

3. The superstructure

The third category is the most discussed; the one that provoked and provokes major controversies. Although Marx was its discoverer, it is the category less worked and defined by him. Let us clarify that, in spite of all these limitations, today, there is almost no serious sociologist — Marxist or not — who does not accept the existence of the superstructure.

What did Marx discover? That above this economic structure, organized around production and distribution, there existed another series of social phenomena, which were different, that did not fit into infrastructure or structure. He called them superstructure. First, the institutions such as state, police, army, church, school, parliament, and we could add political parties, unions, etc., etc.

Institutions became appearing as mankind progressed, as exploitation arose and social life became increasingly complicated and complex. Groups of men specialized in non-economic, non-productive activities, but assigned to manage not just irrigation or storage of grains but the men themselves. And these specialists began to live from and for that activity. Specialists emerged to wage war, priests, teachers, judges, police, and politicians. According to their specialty these men organized in the army, churches, school, justice, police, and political parties. We call these organizations institutions.

Secondly, beliefs, ideologies or false consciences, such as believing in God or in the fatherland, were also appearing in history.

Of course, we refer to social beliefs, beliefs shared by many people. For example, there are 800 million Catholics. Most of the beliefs are false, they are ideologies or false consciences, and usually they are an impediment to the development and advancement of mankind. For example, the ideology of class collaboration is a barrier to the workers’ struggle. But we have also seen false beliefs that have been at one time useful for the class struggle.

During 1600 or 1700 years the class struggle was based on religious beliefs. In the Middle Ages there were terrible civil wars between feudal lords and communist peasant currents. Although both sectors quoted the Bible and claimed to fight for religious issues, they actually fought for

antagonistic social interests. The Bible is not a call to communism or anything suchlike, but when peasants took biblical passages to fight the feudal lords who exploited them, to defend communist, egalitarian positions, this ideology played a positive role. Then, in the 18th century, during the French Revolution, temples to reason were built, instead of temples to god, and this ideology played a positive role because the revolutionaries of that time said the whole society had to be organized rationally, and that therefore there should not be a king, but the citizens should rule. In the past, even if all were false consciences, some were episodically progressive. This is why the Marxist not only asserts ideology is false, but he analyses its role in each historical moment, to see if even if it is false, it may fulfil a progressive role at the time by feeding a fair struggle. From the 19th century, when the proletariat began to organize and Marxism emerges, all ideologies became generally negative, because for the first time a political and social current — which therefore has its ideology — was supported, guided by science and by what happens in reality. Since then, false consciences are nothing more than obstacles to the scientific interpretation of reality.

The different classes are reflected in the superstructure. There are institutions and ideologies of the bourgeoisie, of the exploiters, and there are some of the working class. For example, the CGT [General Confederation of Labour], trade unions, reformist and bureaucratic workers' parties (such as the Communist Party or the Social-Democratic parties), revolutionary workers' parties (such as the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky in Russia or the party we are building) are institutional superstructures of the working class. The UCR [Radical Civic Union], the Justicialist [Peronist] Party, the Intransigent Party, the UIA [Argentine Industrial Union], the parliament, the justice, the catholic church, the Alfonsín¹ government, and of course the police and the army are bourgeois superstructures.

Infrastructure has to do with the development of productive forces, with the production of social wealth. Structure has to do with the organization of the economic life of society, with production and distribution. Superstructure has to do with the organization and functioning of the whole society, with all its activities, not just economic.

In societies based on private ownership of the means of production, the class of proprietors (today the imperialist bourgeoisie), which dominates the production and distribution of goods (structure), also dominates the superstructure. It controls the state, the army and the police, the government, justice, and other fundamental institutions. It disseminates the different false bourgeois consciences to remain in power and to continue exploiting and oppressing the other classes and sectors.

The bourgeois government administers and passes laws to keep “order” in favour of the bosses. The police repress and imprison those who do not comply and justice punishes them, puts them in prison. The priests persuade that things have to be in such a way because God ordained it so and they promise a better life to the discontented, but after death. Teachers do something similar to priests, but through the education of children and young people, so that they fulfil the role they are assigned in production and distribution, depending on the class to which they belong. Priests, teachers, and nowadays, fundamentally, the mass media, in particular radio and TV, transmit to the population the ideas and beliefs that at all times the rich and privileged use to stay in power. Thousands of years ago, they said “the Pharaoh or the Inca rule because they descend from God”. Then they said that the king ruled by God's will. Today, they explain that private property is a “natural right”, that we are all equal and that working hard, anyone can get rich, etc.

One of the most colossal tasks of the revolutionary party is to help eradicate these false consciences from the head of the workers and the people.

¹ **Raul Alfonsín** (1927–2009) was an Argentine lawyer and politician leader at the time of the Radical Civic Union (Spanish: Unión Cívica Radical, or UCR). He went on to become the president of Argentina, between 10 December 1983 and 8 July 1989, following the military dictatorship.

The matter of art and science

There are two very important specialties in human society that we have not named and which are also part of the superstructure. We are referring to art and, in particular, to science. At first we think that science, art and play arise linked to society's natural division of tasks, the division of economic and general tasks that is done in a natural way, without oppression for anyone because it arises from the best use of skills and characteristics of each individual or sector. Society develops the production of goods, not only economic but also cultural — conceptual or knowledge (science) and emotional or of the feelings (art). It also develops activities for leisure, play, which seeks both recreation and training and improvement of natural physical conditions.

Unlike most of the different specialties we named before (army, police, priests and judges), which deal directly with oppressive functions, art, science or games emerged independently and prior to the emergence of the state and the beginning of the functions of violent administration of men.

These activities, even when they may be at the service of oppression and exploitation, do not have this specific purpose, as in the case of the other institutions mentioned above, which are directly linked to the oppressor state.

We must also study very well the role of education and school.

4. A bird-eye's view of history

Marxism asserts that history is neither made by God, nor by certain privileged races or genius men, nor by ideas, but by the class struggle. This view is accepted today by many historians, sociologists, and researchers of different subjects, even if they do not call themselves Marxist. For Marxism, the change, the progress of humanity or its regression are explained by the struggle of one class against another, or of several classes, or between different groups of the same class. In this context, we place the role of the individual: it can be very important as a leader, representative or ideologist, but of certain class interests and what is decisive is the latter.

Something similar happens with the religious ideology that may be very important for a class or sector of class. For example, the Mohammedan conception of life after death says that whoever dies fighting for their religion goes straight to paradise, where every man can every day avail himself to a different virgin female. We all know that the Mohammedans almost dominated the world. They managed to conquer almost the entire south of Europe. Marxism explains that their triumphs were due not to the fact that they fought fiercely to go quickly to paradise to enjoy their reward, but to deep economic and social reasons. The Mohammedans had a privileged geographic location (the Middle East and North Africa), intermediate for the trade between Europe and Asia, which formed a dynamic, vigorous merchant bourgeoisie that sought to conquer all ports that would enable it to dominate trade between Europe and Asia. Muslims then fought for Muhammad for these economic and social reasons and, within that, religious ideas helped them; they a great tool in the interests of the Arab trading bourgeoisie.

Some historians of the French revolution had begun to outline an interpretation similar to Marx's, but he is the first to categorically state that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (1848, Communist Manifesto). This is a new, revolutionary and cornerstone approach to Marxism.

With the further development of historical research, some clarification is required. Already in Marx's and Engels's time it was known that there existed a prolonged period of human life during which classes did not exist, and today we know that this period could have lasted at least a million years.

Classes have existed for only 4000 years or so. We should say that the history of humanity is the history of the development of the productive forces, and for a period, of the class struggle.

The three categories we have already seen (infrastructure, structure and superstructure) make it possible to classify the different societies. Starting from the development of the productive forces, we make a first great division: primitive communism and civilization, since man becomes independent of food production.

5. The origin of mankind: primitive communism

The first form of human social organization, the beginning of the history of mankind was savagery. The development of the productive forces was minimal, incipient. The first men lived on food gathering, hunting, and fishing. Their tools were the club, spear, bow and arrow, traps and nets. There was no real production, that is, transformation of the raw material. As the first men had to go after food, they were nomadic tribes. There was a certain natural division of labour between men and women. Women took care of the children and the hearth and men went to hunt.

With respect to structure, it was an egalitarian society, without exploitation and without owners, without classes; what Marxism calls primitive communism. Everyone worked according to their capacity and ability. The tribe could not allow any of its members to no longer work because it would cause the rest to starve. There was a hint of superstructure: religious beliefs and shamans. The best hunter or warrior was the leader or chieftain. But he worked like the rest and he was changed every time the tribe considered it necessary. Oral language emerges.

The second stage of primitive communism is barbarism. It was born as a consequence of a revolution in the development of the productive forces: Mankind begins to produce food instead of collecting, hunting or fishing it. It began to grow grains and to domesticate animals. This completely changed life, although hunger was not overcome, food became secure because it stopped depending on luck. The peoples ceased to be nomadic, because they no longer needed to move constantly in pursuit of hunting and were tied to crops or livestock — a small vegetable garden next to the hut where the cow or the domesticated pigs were also there. The cultivation was done with very rudimentary methods, barely scraping the ground. Villages appeared which were very small. The population became stable. Other advances in infrastructure were the discoveries of the wheel, fire, textiles and metallurgy.

From the point of view of structure and superstructure, barbarism is essentially the same as savagery. It remained an egalitarian society in which the division of tasks took place naturally, with a very elementary functional superstructure, where the most capable for a given activity occupied the post of chief and could be changed at any time by meeting of the tribe.

At the level allowed by the research of the time and based fundamentally on [Lewis Henry] Morgan's book *Ancient Society*, published in 1877, Marx and Engels studied the stages of savagery and barbarism. After Marx's death, Engels placed his conclusions in the book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, which was published in 1884. For us it may be familiar to mention some primitive communist populations, such as the red skins that inhabited North American territory, or the tribes which they inhabited the South American territory: the Pampas, the Araucanians, the Querandis, the Charruas (in Uruguay), etc. In the last century, the "Conquest of the Desert" campaign headed by General Roca had as goal to finish exterminating the primitive communist tribes that subsisted, to take away their lands.

As we already said, the latest research finds the emergence of the first men about a million years ago. This means that, by far, primitive communism is the longest historical period that mankind has gone through (a million years of equality against 8000 years of exploitation and 3000 or 4000 years of private owners).

6. The emerging of civilisation and exploitation: Asiatic society

About 8000 years ago the greatest revolution in the productive forces prior to that generated by capitalism took place: the discovery of irrigation. To such a point was this a gigantic revolution that it opened up for mankind a whole new epoch or period of history, infinitely superior to primitive communism; a period from we have not yet emerged: the exploitation of man by man.

As man begins to use the waters of the great rivers (the Nile in Egypt, for example) for irrigation agriculture, society begins to produce much more, approximately three to four times more than what each inhabitant needed to survive. So, for the first time there appears a surplus in the production of the entire society, that can be stored for the times of the year when the production goes down or to face catastrophes. For the first time there are peoples who can defend themselves against the hunger that systematically attacks the primitive communists.

With irrigation agriculture, civilization arises, that is, cities, commerce, writing and all the basic institutions that we know today (state, army, church, school, etc.). Although for us it is the Egyptian, because of its proximity to Europe and the films of the pyramids and pharaohs, the largest of the Asian societies was the Chinese. There also existed peoples who developed irrigation and led to great civilizations in India, in Mesopotamia (from what is now Lebanon to Iran). In South America, peoples developed who cultivated the fertile slopes of the mountains on terraces and used for irrigation water from the thawing of the high peaks: the Inca Empire. Similar to them were the great civilizations of the Aztecs in Mexico and the Maya in Guatemala, although more advanced than that of the Incas.

In social structure, it is a caste system. They are not all the same, and although private property and inheritance do not predominate, privileged sectors (the upper castes) emerge that brutally exploit the peasants and artisans (grouped in the lower castes). The privileged do not own the waters, nor the land or canals, nor the tools (that's why they are not classes), but they enjoy their position as bureaucrats, as managers of the distribution of water and by that means, of the production of others and of distribution.

On a small scale there is trade, and in it there is a minimal private property. But trade is not intense, since in general all the production was even, given it was done on similar land and climate, and therefore they gave similar produce. Fine craftsmanship is then developed, which is the basis of trade and is elaborated in large workshops dependent on the state. For the first time, there is social differentiation between those who work and produce and those who manage the work and production of others. This differentiation takes place, on the one hand, because there is an abundance of food, which allows the existence of people who do not produce and yet eat. But it also has to do with the solution of a need. Irrigation requires judges to manage the waters. The farmer tries to get the water to go to his side. And then there has to be an administrator, to avoid that some (the strongest) be left with all the water and the others with nothing. The division of water generates an antagonism, and someone has to appear to regulate it, to avoid this antagonism destroying the social life. It arises, then, for the first time in the history of humanity, the state, to manage the waters and the construction of canals and dams.

Without celebrating or approving for this reason its totalitarian and exploitative nature, we must point out that contradictorily, the state played a progressive, positive role, such as achieving a peaceful distribution of water, preventing peasants and villages from fighting each other for control of the waters.

In Asian society the superstructure is developed in its current outline. The state emerges, those who administer, those who teach, those who write, the priests, soldiers and policemen. They did not work the land or in the craft workshops, but they forced the rest to work, and prevented the peasants and craftsmen from having weapons or from administering.

As the spread of irrigated land increases, and consequently population and production, exploitation is exacerbated and the state becomes ever more gigantic, an immense apparatus with thousands and thousands of bureaucrats or officials who control millions of people managing the largest rivers in the world and headed by omnipotent emperors.

The whole complex social life is controlled in a totalitarian way by this bureaucratic state. Apparently, writing fulfilled a state function, which was to keep accounts, and it was done in the temples and at the service of the emperor or absolute monarch. The three main layers of the Asian bureaucracy are the military, bureaucrats and priests or clerics.

In their development, these societies begin to have an important idle labour force. There are great builders and engineers who, responding to the needs of production, build large canals and dams, based on the mobilization of tens of thousands and thousands of peasants who are forced to work for free. Once the irrigation works have been completed, this work is turned over to the so-called monumental art, which characterizes these civilizations — enormous, inexpressive, rather geometric, and practically without any human expression. The Great Wall of China, the pyramids of Egypt or the great temples of the Sun and the Moon in Mexico are some of the best known examples.

There is an important development of science, but empirical: it gives partial solutions and does not rise to formulate general laws. This is due to the limited development of trade, which will be the great engine for the development of arithmetic, geometry and the most abstract sciences. But in the field of concrete applications and new methods and techniques, spectacular advances were made. From gunpowder to printing, through writing and the solution for specific cases of Pythagoras' theorem, Asian science was formidable. Its numerous discoveries and inventions will pave the way for the emergence of modern abstract science, of general laws, which will happen with the Greeks, as a consequence of the great development of trade in the Mediterranean.

Let's summarize the three basic categories:

Infrastructure: irrigation agriculture, construction of dams and canals and minimal trade, emergence of cities.

Structure: castes and class embryos

Superstructure: the institutions that characterize the different civilized societies arise: state, army, church, school, etc. Monumental art and empirical science.

Around the Asian regime there is a great discussion, since although it was Marx who studied it and named it, Stalinism has systematically denied its existence. It is likely this originated in the controversy that developed over China. In this, Stalin argued that China was a feudal society and from there he concluded the need for revolution in stages, of capitulation to the bourgeoisie, while Trotsky and others argued that in China the decisive fact was the combination of Asian regime with capitalism.

7. The emergence of private property and classes: the ancient world or slave society

About 3000 years ago, around the Mediterranean Sea (southern Europe, North Africa, the near and Middle East), a new type of society of exploiters arose: the slave society. Its main exponents were the Greek civilizations (whose main city was Athens) and Latin (whose main city was Rome). Although it may seem backwards, because we have a Western-educated mentality that glorifies Europe, let us consider that in those early times the most advanced civilizations were the Asian ones, in particular the Chinese.

The new society was born as a product of two great leaps in the development of productive forces. The first was the invention of the metal plough that allowed agriculture to be extended to the drylands (called rainfed agriculture). As it is a light plough, its furrows are shallow and are only useful to cultivate soft lands, without blockages, like those existing on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The second leap is the development of sea navigation, which allowed the exchange of the various productions that existed on the shores of the sea, as a product of different climates and different soils. The wheat of Sicily and Egypt began to be traded for the grapes and wine of Greece and Italy and for the products of metallurgy - first bronze and later iron and steel — that began to develop in Greece and Middle East.

The development of trade gave rise to the emergence of a new relationship: individual private property.

We begin to see the emergence of the owner of a shop, the owner of some land or of the goods that were exchanged. There also appear men who are owners of other men; men who are made to work like beasts, until they die — the slaves. Until then, when in the wars they became prisoners, they were either killed or assimilated as equals to society. At the onset of slavery, for the first time the defeated peoples were transformed into slaves. With private property, man has acquired a new value: he can work for his masters; he can be transformed into a slave, into one more property of the master, to benefit him.

In the social structure of the ancient world, then, well differentiated classes appear for the first time. There are owners of lands and slaves, the masters, there are merchants and there are slaves. Also appearing, although in a very small scale, is a proletariat: free workers who receive a wage for working in small workshops in Athens and Rome. The fundamental classes are masters and slaves. The master is the owner of the slaves —who are not considered men by Aristotle, but a special type of tools — and makes them work to their physical limit, with a right to life and death over them.

Aristotle, one of the greatest thinkers of humanity, made the following definition of Greek society: there are human beings, the owners of slaves and there are tools. The tools are divided into three groups: the speakers, the slaves; semi-speakers, domestic animals (barking, mooing, or neighing); and the mutes, the tools of tillage, the hammer, etc.

With the emergence of classes also appears and develops the class struggle. All antiquity is crossed by great insurrections of slaves. There are also class antagonisms between slave owners and merchants, between commoners and slave owners and traders. There are also wars between cities and even nations. There appear powerful contingents of armed men, in order to repress bloodily the insurrections of slaves and to war against other peoples to enslave them or to colonize them. The development of international trade and of the large cities that monopolized it originated the great empires: of Alexander in Greece, Carthage, Rome, and Alexandria, which oppressed innumerable peoples.

At this time the state acquires the characteristics common to all class societies. Its appearance is a result of the irreconcilable character of class interests. Its fundamental feature is the special detachments of armed men and its function is to defend the interests of the most powerful class, the ruling class. The state in the ancient world was the organ of the slave owners and of the great empires.

The political regime is an oligarchic democracy, in which citizens' rights were exclusively for slave owners and merchants. Commoners were not citizens and slaves were not considered people. Contradictorily, this society of brutal exploitation allowed a great development of art and science, since citizens had all their time for speculative leisure, to think or to have fun and this was a relatively creative leisure. On the other hand, the great development of trade brought a great leap in mathematics.

Modern science was born in Greece with mathematics, logic, medicine and others. The Greeks made precise points on the question of the object of the science — that is studied - and they gave the first laws of abstract thought.

Modern art was also born in Greece, in particular theatre and sculpture. This was essentially individualistic, reflecting the existence of the individual man.

Both art and science were static, also as a result of the fact that slave owners were not a dynamic, vigorous class, launched into the dominion of the world or nature, but merely preoccupied with enjoying the overproduction of their slaves. Except for the Discus Thrower and the Winged Victory of Samothrace, all Greek sculptures are still, static. This is why science was also static and very little linked to production. In Alexandria there was a genius named Hero, who used the methods of modern mechanics to make toys, and no one ever thought of using it to improve production.

The ancient world, the slave society developed around Greece and Rome, entered an inexorable process of decay and disintegration because it stopped progressing. The owners of slaves had no interest in developing production because they lived luxuriously from the exploitation of these.

Traders were also not interested in developing production, because they gained from the exchange of regional products and lived very well with what they earned by trading products from the different regions under the influence of the empire.

In the 4th century of the Christian era (year 313), the Roman Empire, already in full decline, officially adopted the Christian religion. In the 5th century the Western Roman Empire fell before the advance of the barbarian tribes and the year 476 (fall of the last emperor) is considered the date the Middle Ages began.

8. Feudalism

The feudal system, corresponding roughly to what is called the Middle Ages, began more or less in the 4th to 5th centuries and began to be overcome by capitalism in the 15th century. In schools they paint us the Middle Ages as a period of total darkness and regression in the history of humanity, but it actually was a complex period, contradictory, where undeniable setbacks were combined with great advances in the development of productive forces.

On the one hand, because of the Arabs' invasion, trade in the Mediterranean (which, as we saw, was a dynamic factor for the development of previous societies) was closed for centuries. All of Europe was transformed into an agricultural economy based on self-sufficiency and cities disappeared.

But, at the same time, there was a great leap in the development of the productive forces, which allowed the colonization of the entire European continent. The use of the much heavier iron plough enabled the cultivation of forested areas and the hard lands of central and northern Europe. There was also a great technical advance, the rotation of cultivated land. If we have three plots, we leave one uncultivated for a whole year, so that it can recover the fertility (it remains in "fallow"), and thus it is rotating one by one. This system was used for over a thousand years until this century, when chemical fertilizers were incorporated. Just as Argentina was colonized last century, Europe was colonized barely a thousand years ago, during the Middle Ages and thanks to the iron plough and the rotation of crops.

The fundamental feudal relations began emerging towards the end of the Roman Empire and were combined with the advance of the barbarian tribes, which produced a coupling, an integration of two civilizations. This has nothing to do with the picture that is normally painted of "invasions" of "barbarians". The system of servitude, characteristic of feudalism, arose from the Roman settlement. Given the decline of the empire and the lack of productivity of the lands cultivated by the slaves, the large landowners began to "free" them, tying them to a parcel of land they gave them to exploit. In exchange for that "freedom", they demanded a percentage of their production and, over time, of their work. The fundamental requirement was that they could not leave the land they were given. In fact this system is feudal servitude. This new relation of production was extended, with the colonization, from Italy and the south of France, to all Europe.

New relations of production and a different structure emerge. Slavery disappears — or rather, it remains a marginal phenomenon, domestic — and relations of servitude arise: the serf has to render services for the feudal lord.

The serf belongs to the land and not to the feudal lord. If the lord goes to another place and leaves his lands, or if somebody takes them away, or if he gives them to a relative, the peasants working in those lands, the serfs, do not follow him, but stay with that land and change of lord. In slavery, the exploiter owns people and lands. In feudalism, he owns the land, with the people who work it. In slavery, everything that the slave produces is for the owner. In feudalism the magnitude of exploitation is clearly delimited: the tenth part is for the Church (the tithe) and the seven days in a week, one day he rests, three he works for the Lord and three days for himself.

At first the feudal lords were very progressive. They colonized the new lands and to ensure that the peasants would accompany them they gave many freedoms and guarantees. It was customary for the feudal lords to sign a contract, where they committed themselves to defend their particular serfs from armed attacks (the feudal lord formed the military institution around them), and the services they demanded were not many.

As production and population increased, feudalism became more and more exploitative, more reactionary. In the second half and towards the end of the Middle Ages the situation of the peasants was appalling. Taxes and services had increased wildly, and the feudal lord had all sorts of rights, some even capricious. For example, they were all crazy for hunting and they had the right to enter with their horses and their dogs in the cultivated fields to go after their pray and they destroyed the fields. The peasants were overwhelmed by dozens and dozens of rights of the lords and the church, which was the other great exploiter and one of the largest landowners. France was the most feudal country and there came to be almost two hundred different obligations on the eve of the great French revolution.

In the superstructure, the two main institutions were the state and the church. The state was in hierarchical levels. First there is the knight or baron, who dominates a small expanse of land, which was called a fief and where he commanded. A count or a duke commands several lords. A prince commands several counts or dukes. Above the princes was the king. Although there were some very strong, in general the kings were weak, because it was a manoeuvre by the princes so the king would not dominate them. The Christian church (which remained united until the 16th century) was of decisive importance, and throughout a period was a factor of control superior to the own kings, because it was the institution that gave unity to the feudal system, since it monopolized the education, civil registry, almost all cultural expressions, and art and science.

In fact, in one period, the church controlled the whole superstructure except for the state (the nobles and the king, to whom it also influenced in a certain way, indirectly). The absence of large cities, the disappearance of trade, the role of the church, made the population very uneducated, particularly the nobles who were mostly illiterate, for example the great emperor Charlemagne.

Medieval art is essentially rural and revolves around nobles and churches. As the cities developed, a much more evolved art emerged, whose great expression is the great Gothic cathedrals, and also the paintings and sculptures of the Renaissance.

Science is much more backward than the science of the Arab world. There is a stagnation or regression as a result of the almost disappearance of trade. From the Renaissance (15th century) begins the translation from Arabic of its scientific achievements, which serve as the basis for the colossal development of modern sciences and techniques. The reestablishment of the channels of communication with the East began giving place to the resurgence of trade and, therefore, of the cities. In cities, called boroughs, commerce and money were concentrated, and traders and moneylenders took great care to keep themselves independent of the nobles.

Kings often went to the cities for help, to borrow money, and then they were made to sign a pledge they would respect the autonomy of the city. Along with the traders and moneylenders, the artisans were strengthened. The most important centre for handicraft development took place in Italy, particularly in Florence and later in the Netherlands.

In the bowels of feudalism between the 13th and 14th centuries these new social sectors were emerging primarily linked to trade and usury, which began to form a trading and financier bourgeoisie, who received new impetus as trade in the Mediterranean resumed.

With the development of trade, the bourgeoisie and the artisans developed more and more and entered into a conflict. The craftsmen had corporate organizations with very strict regulations, very rigid, that allowed them to keep the secrets of the trade and live well. The guild said “a shoe of such characteristics and quality is charged so much” and everyone complied. This was not in the interests of the bourgeoisie, because they set very high prices, and the bourgeoisie wanted products of low prices and large-scale production.

The craftsmen were petty bourgeois, proprietors and very wealthy, a very strong urban class, and in each trade there were very strict hierarchical scales. You began as an apprentice, then you passed to journeyman, and finally some became masters. This system did not suit the bourgeoisie who needed cheap labour to produce and earn more. A relentless struggle was established and the bourgeoisie did everything to steal from the artisans their secrets. Capitalism was born by attacking the structure of the guilds and bringing raw materials to the peasants’ houses, so that they could do part of the work much cheaper.

The bourgeoisie also clashed with the landowners and the church, because they wanted the land to be bought and sold freely, instead of being delivered in perpetuity for reasons of nobility or for certain services rendered to the monarch. On the other hand, the existence of small fiefs was a brake for the development of internal trade, reason why the bourgeoisie fought for the liquidation of the fiefs and for the unity in national states without internal borders.

In the 15th century capitalist production begins to change the physiognomy of the feudal world. With the discovery of America (1492) and the other territories and interoceanic ways and the great discoveries of modern science and technology, the conditions were set for the new production system to be imposed all over the world.

9. The capitalist system

We will see this system very briefly. Capitalism meant a colossal revolution in production and in all orders of social life. The capitalist system develops more energy sources than all previous systems put together. The list of discoveries and inventions that constantly revolutionize production is inexhaustible. At present, in a single year more books are published than those that humanity made in all its history until the 19th century. The successive advances in the development of the productive forces mark the transition from crafts to manufacturing and then to the great industry. Manufacturing was the liquidation of craft work by grouping many workers in the same workplace and specialising each one in a part of the productive process, producing much faster and cheaper than in the craft workshop. Between 1770 and 1830 came the Industrial Revolution, with the introduction of steam power and machine tools; this began the period of great industry and the bourgeoisie acquired full control.

This continued with colossal advances, such as new sources of energy (electricity, oil, etc.), the invention of the automobile, tractors, agricultural machinery, aircraft, etc. Capitalist production spread throughout the world and became a world system. In the 20th century, with cybernetics, rocketry, petrochemicals, electronics and other developments came what is called the “third industrial revolution.”

In the structure of capitalist society we find that the two main and antagonistic classes are the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. At the beginning of this paper we have already described the classes and their relationship in capitalist society.

In the superstructure, in the first stage, where feudalism is combined with capitalism, there are absolute monarchies also called enlightened despotism. They are very strong regimes, which

arbitrate between the nobility and the bourgeoisie, making great concessions to the latter, especially to the financier bourgeoisie to which the kings owed much money. These absolute monarchies were a continuation of the feudal system. The exploitation of the peasants is increasingly worse, but at the same time the monarch was taking power from the feudal lords, leaning on the bourgeoisie.

Then the bourgeois state clearly appeared, with regimes that liquidated all the privileges of nobility and gave citizens the right to elect their rulers. The 17th century saw the great English revolution, which imposed the regime of the parliamentary monarchy that rules until today. At the end of the 18th century there was the great French revolution, with which the first republican regime, bourgeois parliamentary democracy, emerged.

Art and science experienced an unprecedented development in these systems.

The colossal development of the productive forces and social wealth that capitalism caused reached its climax in the 19th century. From the late 19th century, with the emergence of monopolies, capitalism began to transform into its imperialist stage. And since 1914, the existence of the bourgeoisie (owner of the means of production and exchange) and of the bourgeois states and their national borders became a barrier, an absolute stopper for growth. The productive forces stopped growing. World War I, with its aftermath of millions of dead (a bloody and great destruction of productive forces, was a monstrous expression of capitalism decay.

In the 20th century, mankind entered the era of imperialist capitalism, an era of restraint and decay of the productive forces, an era of crisis, wars and revolutions.

We will not develop this period here. Let us simply say that in 1917 the chain of world domination of the imperialist bourgeoisie was broken at one of its weakest links, the tsarist regime in Russia. The first workers' revolution, led by the Bolshevik Party triumphed; the first workers' state emerged and the regime of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat of Lenin and Trotsky prevailed.

Despite the fact that the workers' state was isolated, because the world revolution did not advance, and despite its bureaucratization and the prevailing of Stalin's counterrevolutionary regime, the productive forces of the USSR, reorganized according to the planned economy and the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, the socialization of production and distribution, had a spectacular development. The backward and peasant Russia began to place among some of the top countries in various aspects of production, touching the heels (and sometimes surpassing) the United States and other great imperialist powers.

The characteristics of the class structure and the superstructure in the USSR and in the countries where the bourgeoisie was expropriated since the postwar period and the relationship between the triumphs of the revolution in one or several countries and the defeat of imperialism throughout the world are subjects of other works. Within the limits of this work, we need to place these processes as part of a single world capitalist system. §