

**2016-05-30 From the preparatory notes for Class 06 of the introductory course on political economy: ‘The evolution of property and how it rules the world’.**

---

**Introduction to the extract from *The German Ideology* by Marx and Engels.**

We begin to read and discuss the text in the full class. The intention is to divide into groups next time to continue reading and discussing the text, followed by a plenary session to consider and clarify the points raised. If that works well, we’ll continue the pattern.

**Begin reading of the *German Ideology* extract** [Reached the end of paragraph 9 by mid-point in the class. Reading and discussion will be continued from paragraph 10 next time, and class members are asked to read ahead in preparation.]

**Essential points to emphasise as the discussion proceeds:**

❖ **Material conditions, and the way human beings produce and reproduce their living** under the prevailing conditions, provide the basis for the way they think about their lives. The way we think is not crudely ‘determined’ by material conditions, but material conditions limit the real possibilities open to us, and so limit the scope for the contest of serious ideas. It is mainly in this sense that ‘conditions determine consciousness’ in society. **Production** is central to the **materialist conception** pioneered by Marx and Engels in contrast to the ‘German ideology’ of Hegel and his followers.

❖ Over long periods of time, human beings change their material conditions by developing their forces of production (**‘productive forces’**).<sup>1</sup> The level of development of the forces of production provides the foundation for organising the way we produce. The way we produce (that is, our ‘mode of production’) is central to the organisation of society, and to prevailing social norms. Again, the way we produce is not crudely ‘determined’ but is rather constrained as to alternative possibilities by the level of development of productive forces.

---

<sup>1</sup> Productive forces are forces of motion and forces of intent. The motive or kinetic forces join with the intentional (or intellectual) forces in the formation and use of implements so as to produce from available materials various objects of utility. Materials are extracted from nature, and are refined and compounded, so as themselves to become integral to the productive forces. Both the kinetic and the intellectual forces of production, together with the materials and implements in which they are combined and by means of which they operate, have undergone a drawn-out but now quite phenomenal development. Along with this technological development — at times retarding it, at other times promoting it, but tending ultimately to succumb and adapt to its power — the social relations of production have evolved.

❖ The development of **technology** and the development of the '**division of labour**' in society have historically gone hand in hand. (Marx and Engels introduce us to this, and we shall look at it in much more detail later.)

❖ The development of the forces of production creates and increases the ability of society to produce a **surplus** over and above its immediate needs. This has a two-fold consequence. On the one hand, historically, it has created the possibility of unequal property; the possibility for some to live off the labour of others, and to empower and enrich themselves at society's expense (**exploitation**). This has been the basis for the emergence of the division of society into classes. This has a very long history, and Marx and Engels are introducing us to the way in which this phenomenon has developed and changed. On the other hand, the increasing ability of society to produce a surplus means that the pressure of **scarcity and insecurity** could and should be reduced, and the *possibility* emerges of human beings **sharing equally in abundance**.

[BREAK]

### **Show Bronowski video**

[Episode 2 'Harvest of the Seasons' from the TV series *The Ascent of Man* by Jacob Bronowski (1969)]

Next time, we will critically discuss the video and its implications.