

# The Superstructure and The Base – Paper I

Now, a long standing jibe of the enemies of Marxism, has always been that “They cannot even explain their own existence!”, by which they mean that the supposed strict determinism of Marxists ought to be able to explain how they themselves arose directly from the capitalist Economic Base of Society, “Like everything else is supposed to do!”

It is an old, and very effective, trick. Such a statement both includes a question that is profoundly difficult to answer in a few words, and includes the concoction of a whole set of caricatures of your opponents’ position designed for easy demolition.

I could deal with each in turn and show the dishonesty of the method, but such a technique forgets that the criticism was not an argument expecting answers, but on the contrary a quick denouncement, with no expectation of a following argument.

As soon as the downer had been uttered, the “critics” would already be “on their way”.

But, at the same time, such a criticism SHOULD make those criticised think, because a full answer will involve several very profound things about how the World, and even our thinking on it, works.

Certainly, if you were taunting rather young and immature followers of Marxism, and your own philosophical position left a great deal to be desired, then it was an effective and seemingly rather clever criticism.

But, of course, it was no such thing!

They got away with it because BOTH sides of the argument have incorrect assumptions about determinism.: congenitally and necessarily on the part of the enemies of Marxism, and, and as a measure of the immaturity of youth, and lack of a full appreciation on the part of the budding Marxists.

But, such a criticism would be crucified by a fully conversant Marxist.

The explanation lies in the relative independence of the Superstructure of Society from its Economic Base.

For that Superstructure rests on the Emergence of Levels **in all systems**, and most of all in the highest forms of organisation on the surface of this Planet – those involving Man and Society.

Now, if these comments seem to explain nothing so far, bear with me. I promised that it would involve profound ideas, and it certainly does!

I will explain!

To understand the relative independence of the Superstructure in Society from its “determining” Economic Base, we must establish first what we mean by these categories. Marx, in his development of what came to be called Marxism, integrated a whole series of major areas of Mankind’s thinking about Reality.

First, he found it necessary to reject his own philosophical standpoint – that of Idealism, as being inadequate to cope with the whole, rich panoply of Reality. Idealism was, perhaps unavoidably, a Man-centred system. It tackled the biggest question of all – Human Thinking, in terms of itself alone. And, it must be said, in the hands of Hegel, it had been very successful in this demanding field.

Marx himself was a committed Hegelian, but, the march of Science and the wide spectrum of other significant developments, increasingly undermined the idealist standpoint as the “ideal” place from which to study, and grasp, the necessity of the whole in some integrated way.. Hegel’s attempt, though heroic was necessarily somewhat different. He saw everything via Man’s Thinking about it, so it was more about Thought than about Reality. In fact Marx led the whole group of leading disciples of Hegel – the so-called Young Hegelians from Idealism to embrace the Materialist standpoint instead.

It was a remarkable philosophical Event, became even more shocking when Marx denounced the mere description of the world by philosophers, and stated that the purpose was to Change it. He became a revolutionary Socialist.

The switch was not some lightweight flip to the opposite. Just too much important stuff was accumulating well beyond the reach of idealism, and a competent, cohesive and comprehensive Philosophy just HAD to incorporate ALL these wonderful gains WITHOUT them being transformed through the filter of “Forms of Thought” alone.

To achieve a single World View of this nature, the basis could only be Materialism.

Before we explain, exactly what kind of Materialism, we must first address the components that Marx required to be integrated.

There were, of course, all of the Sciences. The gains of Galileo and Newton were already around 200 years old by this time, and had greatly expanded in all directions from Primary Sciences such as Physics, Chemistry and Biology, and even the infant Geology, via the intellectual tools, such as Mathematics, and off via Engineering to the burgeoning Industrial Revolution.

In Economics, the British School had made the first steps in analysing Capitalist Society, and its ebbs and flows, Booms and Crises. Marx turned to this body of work for his own subsequent studies, which culminated with his own major work, *Capital*.

The understanding of the trajectory of History, had been begun by the French Historians led by Michelet, who for the first time saw History as part of the March of Mankind, and not merely stories about Kings and Queens and Wars. They attempted a Materialist Conception of History.

In yet another direction, a new generation of what came to be called Utopian Socialists had started on a thorough-going criticism of Capitalist Society, and had formulated “the Next Stage”, which they called Socialism.

Marx knew what his task had to be. He had to integrate these different narratives into a necessary Whole, and to do it he would use as his unifying base - the Materialist standpoint.

And these were only the most pressing areas to be addressed. Philosophers were surrounded on all sides by new thinking in a multiplicity of areas, and the basis that he embarked upon was to be such as to accommodate ALL objective Knowledge and Understanding.

**To be continued**

(967 words)