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ON MARX'S "FORMS OF SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS"

The following quotation is contained in Marx's *formula* of materialistic interpretation of history—the formula which he starts to propound by saying that “the general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, continued to serve as the leading thread of my studies may be briefly *formulated* as follows” :—

“In the social production of their life men enter into definite relations that are necessary and independent of their will ; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real basis, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life determines generally the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.”

I shall herein discuss the “forms of social consciousness” which is contained in the foregoing extraction. The most generally accepted view regarding this phrase is that the legal and political superstructures are first erected upon the real “basis” and upon them, in turn, are erected, as a third storied structure, the forms of social consciousness. Those who take this view usually believe that the word “superstructure” (which is contained in the clause “with the change of economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed”) designates not only the legal and political superstructures but other structures as well. Those people naturally identify the forms of social consciousness with “the legal, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short ideological forms,” which phrase is found in the latter part of the formula.

My own views are somewhat different from this. In my own opinion, some of the forms of social consciousness (I shall call "the forms of economic consciousness" for convenience sake) which has an inseparable connection with the "real basis" which constitutes the economic structure of society. These forms of economic consciousness are interwoven in the basis. It is not that the legal and political superstructures are erected on the basis and upon them stand the forms of social consciousness as a second set of superstructures—in the air, as if it were, and considerably away from the basis. (Had this been Marx's idea, his formula would not have a break in the sentence construction when explaining the nature of the real basis by adding the phrase "*on which* rise legal and political superstructures and *to which* correspond definite forms of social consciousness.") Thus, in my own opinion, a study of the economic structure of society means a study of the dominating forms of social consciousness. A study of the former is a study of the latter.

In both "Critique of Political Economy" and "Capital," which is a continuation of the former work, Marx studied "the capitalist mode of production and the condition of production and exchange corresponding to that mode" or "the economic structure" of the capitalist society as its "real basis." It may be supposed that, if my view be correct, Marx must have discussed in these two works the forms of social consciousness in the capitalist society. Let us search for facts in question. I believe that in a certain sense both "Critique of Political Economy" and "Capital" contain nothing but a study of the forms of social consciousness in the capitalist society. Let us commence with "Capital." Capital, which is the central topic of discussion in "Capital," can be regarded as a definite historical form of social consciousness. The capitalist is conscious of his possessing, say, a million or a billion yen, although his wealth may be in the forms of a factory, machinery, or raw materials. The wage-labourers employed by him, also, recognize him

as the possessor of a million or a billion yen. In other words, capital is one of the principal forms of social consciousness in a society which is based upon the capitalist mode of production. It is one of the most "social" forms of consciousness which is common to every one living in the capitalist society—common to the rich and poor, to the educated and the illiterate, to the old as well as the young.

How was this form of consciousness produced? This question can only be adequately answered by studying the capitalist mode of production, or "the mode of production of material life in the capitalist society." How does the content of this consciousness develop? This question can only be answered by studying "the development of relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of men's material powers of production." "A negro is a negro. In certain conditions he is transformed into a slave. A spinning-jenny is a machine for spinning cotton. Only under certain circumstances does it become capital. Outside these circumstances it is no more capital than gold is intrinsically money, or sugar is the price of sugar.Now capital also is a social relation of production. It is a bourgeois relation of production."¹⁾ When a certain thing is placed in such a condition, or in other words, when men establish a certain relation of production through a certain thing, that thing becomes capital; and, at the same time, consciousness of capital is produced in men's minds. In consequence, consciousness of capital and the development of the content of that consciousness correspond to the relations of the capitalist production. In order to understand this truth one must carefully peruse the entire volumes of "Capital" which deals not with definitions, but with "definite functions which express themselves in definite categories."²⁾

"Capital does not consist of means of subsistence, im-

¹⁾ Lohnarbeit und Kapital.

²⁾ Das Kapital, 11 S. 197.

plements of labour, and raw material alone, nor only of material products; it consists just as much of exchange-values. All the products of which it consists are commodities. Thus capital is not merely the sum of material products; it is a sum of commodities, of exchange-values, of social quantities."⁸⁾ For this reason a study of the movement of capital and of the movement of the capitalist society must begin with an analysis of commodities. By analyzing the nature of commodities we come to the conclusion that a certain thing becomes a commodity and acquires commodity-value because it is placed in a definite relation of production, and that consciousness of a commodity and of value is produced in our minds. The same thing can be said of gold which becomes money, a special commodity. "Gold of itself is not money;" it becomes so only after it has been placed in a definite social relation, and consciousness of its being money is produced in men's minds. Such things as the commodity, money, exchange-value and price are the manifestations of relations of production in the commodity-producing society, and are, at the same time, the forms of social consciousness. A thing of use-value—rice for example—can be a commodity in our society, but it cannot be so in Robinson Crusoe's lone island. In order to become a commodity a thing must come and stand in relation with things possessed by others. When the possessor of an article, A, establishes social relation with the possessor of an article, B, through these articles, these articles become commodities. For Robinson Crusoe in his lone island rice is rice but it cannot become a commodity. Supposing he had gold money in his pocket at the time of the wreck, it will cease to be money the moment he lands on the island.

It is evident that a thing cannot have either exchange-value or price as a commodity where there is neither commodity nor money. But in our society almost every product

⁸⁾ Lohnarbeit und Kapital.

has been transformed into a commodity and as such has exchange-value or price. Thus the conception of exchange-value is one of the most universal forms of social consciousness. Every one living in the world of commodities without regard to social or economic distinction or age, is conscious that a certain thing is worth so much money. That a certain form of consciousness always corresponds to a definite relation of production becomes clear as one peruses chapters in "Capital." Let us get an example from Volume 111 of "Capital." We know that in the capitalist society surplus labour gives rise to the idea of profit and that there is a corresponding consciousness of profit in the same society. In our feudal society the surplus labour of the exploited class gave rise to the idea of "nengu" or a land tax in kind and there was a corresponding social consciousness. As the surplus labour of the wage workers in the capitalist society takes the form of profit, we have the corresponding consciousness of profit. For this reason the analysis of relations of production that inevitably leads to the idea of surplus value is really the study of the process by which the form of consciousness of profit has been produced in human minds. Thus Marx says in Volume 111 of "Capital": "The conformations of the capitals evolved in this Third Volume approach, step by step, that form which they assume on the surface of society, in the mutual interactions, in competition, and in the ordinary *consciousness* of the human agencies in this process."⁴

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness." This, which may be regarded as the spirit of the historical materialism, is scientifically determined by a study of economics—by studying how such things as the commodity, money, capital, value, price, profit, etc. correspond to relations of production into which men enter in their social production of life. For

⁴ Das Kapital, 111 1, S. 2.

this reason, the historical materialism is a general conclusion which is reached, in the opinion of Marx, after studying economics.

Some of those who believe that the forms of social consciousness constitute the second superstructures which are placed over "the legal and political superstructures," regard "Critique of Political Economy" and "Capital" as studies of pure economic processes and think that Marx has never made a study of the forms of social consciousness. One of the recent works showing such an opinion is the article of Mr. Kazuo Fukumoto entitled "A study of the place of Capital in the critique of economics" in which he analyses "the modern bourgeois society"⁵⁾ into the following processes:—

The first.....pure economic processes

The second.....state processes (or political processes)

The thirdconscious processes

The fourth.....inter-state processes

Mr. Fukumoto then asserts that "what Marx wanted to treat and actually treated in Capital never went beyond what I call the pure economic processes of the capitalist production." I fail to understand why conscious processes stand between state processes and inter-state processes. But he explains what he means by conscious processes when he says that "the bourgeoisie have the forms of social consciousness—or what I call conscious processes." He then claims that the conscious processes, or the forms of social consciousness, are separated from economic processes, form the second superstructures, and lie outside of Marx's field of discussion. In my own opinion, such an interpretation as this only reveals one's ignorance of the determining characteristics of Marxian economics. There are the following two vital points in Marx's economics: first, relations of production between men correspond to a

⁵⁾ *Marxism*, (マルクス主義) Vol. 1, 8, pp. 499-500.

definite stage of development of their material power of production; secondly, forms of social consciousness correspond to definite relations of production. These two essential views differentiate his economics from what he calls the "bourgeois economics." Thus, he is proving a universal proposition that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness," by elucidating how such forms of social consciousness as the commodity, money, capital, value, price, profit etc., are corresponding to definite relations of production. Marx devotes his entire volumes of *Capital* to prove this above-stated point, but some think that "*Capital*" does not deal with the question of forms of social consciousness, because they regard such things as the commodity, money, capital, value, etc., either as things themselves or their natural qualities. Because of this their erroneous conception, the fact that Marx points out that these economic categories are historical forms of consciousness which correspond to definite relations of production, cannot be comprehended by them.

That the opinions of those critics of Marx are directly opposed to his real spirit can be judged from the outward form of "*Critique of Political Economy*" in the preface to which he gives the formula of historical materialism, although what is discussed in the book are nothing but the commodities and money (value and price). Thus we know that even his discussion on commodity and money shows that the form of consciousness which is known as the "commodity-value" corresponds to the special and historical relation of production which is known as the "commodity-production." Moreover, Marx states in the first part of the formula that he reached that interpretation as a result of his study of economics. This conclusively proves that the understanding of his economic views is a prerequisite for the thorough understanding of his historical materialism. The preface to "*Critique of Political Economy*" contains Marx's formula, and his main work, "*Capital*," is the con-

tinuation of the former work, as he explicitly tells us in the preface to the first edition of the latter. Thus the formula of historical materialism is at once the preface to and the conclusion of, his greatest work, "Capital." Those who boldly assert that Marx never dealt with anything other than "the pure economic processes of the capitalist production" by dismembering the first part of the formula—by separating from the economic structure of society the legal and political superstructures as well as the forms of social consciousness, calling the first by the name of "pure economic processes, the second by "state processes," and the third, "conscious processes"—certainly display their ignorance and bury the main idea of his life work in the dust of mis-interpretation. Just as it is wrong to separate "the economic structure of society" from "the forms of social consciousness," it is also a grave mistake to separate "the legal and political superstructures" from "the economic structure of society" upon which the former stand. Nor is it correct to divide social processes into "the pure economic processes" and "the state processes" and to say that Marx's discussion does not extend beyond the former processes.

In the latter part of the formula in question, Marx refers to "relations of production or property-relations which are only legal manifestations of the former." It is evident that these two sets of relations cannot be regarded as independent of each other. It is impossible to conceive of the commodities which are dealt with in Chapter I, Part I, of the first volume of "Capital," apart from the private property over products; and exchange between commodities is nothing but a legal act between different owners of commodities. The production-process of capital which are discussed in Part II and the following, of the same work, cannot exist apart from the monopolistic ownership of the means of production by the capitalist, or, in other words, without legal relations; and also apart from the relations of employment between the capitalist and the wage-labaurer

which are also legal relations. Volume II of "Capital" deals with the circulation-process of capital which takes place through a legal action known as transaction. Production relations and legal relations, economic actions and legal actions—these do not exist in separation as do water and oil. Some legal relations and relations of production which are expressed by the former are like both sides of the same paper.

In the latter part of his formula Marx states that the period of social revolution arrives when the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production; and that, "in considering such transformations the distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophic—in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out." But what are these ideological forms?

Regarding this Mr. Tamizo Kushida gives his views as follows:—⁶⁾

"Although Marx enumerates as ideological form the legal, political, religious, aesthetic and philosophic forms, he omits the economic form of consciousness. But his formula says that the sum total of these relations of production constitute the economic structure of society—the real basis, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. And therefore, economic ideas as well as religious, philosophic, legal, and political ideas are included in 'the forms of social consciousness.' Why then does not Marx enumerate in the quotation given in the beginning of the paragraph economic forms of consciousness, when he mentions other forms? This is my opinion that those things which are

⁶⁾ "Essay on Socialism," in the "Kaizo," (改造) 1924, July, p. 3.

bound up with 'the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science' and which are to be distinguished from 'the ideological forms' are meant to be definite economic facts, and not economic ideas themselves. I do not believe that his political ideas include economic ideas; nor does it seem reasonable to suppose that Marx forgot to mention economic forms in his formula."

The question is, What is the nature of difference between "ideological forms" and "forms of social consciousness"? I have already pointed out that, of forms of social consciousness, what can be regarded as forms of economic consciousness are such things as the commodity, money, capital, value, price, profit, etc., all of which have an inseparable connection with relations of production and which are not included among ideological conceptions in which men become conscious of the contradictions of material life and fight it out. For this reason Marx excluded economic forms from what he calls ideological forms in the latter part of his formula. I shall cite an example to elucidate my point.

The bourgeois revolution in Japan which is known as the Meiji Ishin was carried out in the name of loyalty and antiforeign exclusionism which can be regarded as either political or religious conceptions, and there is no doubt that it was not carried out under the ideas such as the commodity, money value, price etc. But Marx would contend that the revolution is not to be explained from the standpoint, not of those ideological forms but of the relations of production which existed at the time. And an explanation of relations of productions cannot be made without economic categories such as the commodity, value, money, etc, which are the reflections of the former upon human minds. For this reason an analysis of economic facts resolves itself into an analysis of these forms of economic consciousness. The transformation of the economic conditions of production inevitably accompanies a similar transformation of the con-

tents of the forms of economic consciousness. A survey of the present capitalist society reveals that the constant transformation of relations of production are accompanying a similar transformation in the economic ideas, (the one notable example being the finance-capital which is the latest form of capital.) This is a change in an economic form of consciousness. Such conceptions as Socialism or Communism are some of those "ideological forms in which man become conscious of the contradictions of material life and fight it out." Although these political conceptions are also determined by the existing relations of production, they are quite different from those forms of economic consciousness (commodity, money, value, price, capital, profit, etc., etc.) which everyone in society have.

HAJIME KAWAKAMI