

THE
MATERIALIST
CONCEPTION
OF HISTORY

by George Plekhanov



INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS

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**The Materialist
Conception of
History**
(1891)

Written: 1897.

Source: **Essays in Historical Materialism** (Approx. the first half of the essay reproduced here)-

Publisher: International Publishers.

Transcribed: Andy Blunden.

HTML Markup: Andy Blunden.

I

We must confess that it was with no little prejudice that we took up the book of this Roman professor. We had been rather frightened by certain works of some of his compatriots – A. Loria, for example (see, in particular, *La teoria economica della costituzione politica*). But a perusal of the very first pages was enough to convince us that we had been mistaken, and that Achille Loria is one thing and Antonio Labriola another. And when we reached the end of the book we felt that we would like to discuss it with the Russian reader. We hope that he will not be annoyed with us. For after all, “So rare are books that are not banal!”

Labriola’s book first appeared in Italian. The French translation is clumsy, and in places positively infelicitous. We say this without hesitation, although we have not the Italian original before us. But the Italian author cannot be held responsible for the French translator. At any rate, Labriola’s ideas are clear even in the clumsy French translation. Let us examine them.

Mr. Kareyev, who, as we know, very zealously reads and most successfully manages to distort every “work” having any relation at all to the *materialist conception* of history, would probably inscribe our author in the list of “*economic materialists*.” But that would be wrong. Labriola firmly, and fairly consistently, adheres to the materialist conception of history, but he does not regard himself as an “economic materialist.” He is of the opinion that this title applies more fittingly to writers like Thorold Rogers than to himself and those who think like him. And that is perfectly true, although at a first glance it may not seem quite clear.

Ask any Narodnik or subjectivists what is an economic materialist, and he will answer that an economic materialist is one who attributes predominant importance to the economic factor in social life. That is how our Narodniks and subjectivists *understand economic materialism*. And it must be confessed that there undoubtedly are people who attribute to the economic “factor” a predominant role in the life of human society. Mr. Mikhailovsky has more than once cited Louis Blanc as one who had spoken of the predominance of this factor long before a certain master of certain Russian disciples. But one thing we do not understand: Why did our venerable subjective sociologist pick on Louis Blanc? He should have known that in this respect Louis Blanc had many predecessors. Guizot, Minier, Augustin Thierry and Toqueville all recognised the predominant role of the economic “factor,” at least in the history of the Middle Ages and of modern times. Consequently, all these historians were economic materialists. In our days, the said Thorold Rogers, in his *Economic Interpretation of History*, also revealed himself as a convinced economic materialist; he too recognised the predominant importance of the economic “factor.”

It is not to be concluded from this, of course, that Thorold Rogers’ social and political views were identical with those, say, of Louis Blanc: Rogers held the view of the bourgeois economists, whereas Louis Blanc was at one time an exponent of Utopian Socialism. If Rogers had been asked what he thought of the bourgeois economic system, he would have said that at the basis of this system lie the fundamental attributes of human nature, and that, consequently, the history of its rise is the history of the

gradual removal of obstacles that at one time hindered, and even totally precluded, the manifestation of these attributes. Louis Blanc, on the other hand, would have declared that capitalism itself was one of the obstacles raised by ignorance and violence to the creation of an economic system which would at last really correspond to human nature. This, as you see, is a very material difference.

Who would be nearer to the truth? To be frank, we think that both these writers were almost equally remote from it, but we have neither the wish nor the opportunity to dwell on this point here. What is important to us just now is something else. We would request the reader to observe that in the opinion of both Louis Blanc and Thorold Rogers the economic factor, which predominates in social life, was itself, as the mathematicians put it, a *function* of human nature, and chiefly of the human mind and human knowledge. The same must be said of the above-mentioned French historians of the Restoration period. Well, and what name shall we give to the views on history of people who, *although they assert that the economic factor predominates in social life, yet are convinced that this factor – the economics of society – is in its turn the fruit of human knowledge and ideas?* Such views can only be called *idealistic*.

We thus find that *economic materialism does not necessarily preclude historical idealism*. And even that is not quite accurate; we say that it does not necessarily preclude idealism but what we should say is that *perhaps – as it has been mostly hitherto – it is nothing but a variety of idealism*. After this, it will be clear why men like Antonio Labriola do not regard themselves as economic

materialists: *it is because they are consistent materialists and because, as regards history, their views are the direct opposite of historical idealism.*

II

“However,” Mr. Kudrin will probably tell us, “you, with the habit common to many of the ‘disciples,’ are resorting to paradoxes, are juggling with words, deceiving the eye and sword-swallowing. As you put it, it is the idealists who are economic materialists. But in that case, what would you have us understand by genuine and consistent materialists? Do they reject the idea of the predominance of the economic factor? Do they believe that side by side with this factor there are other factors operating in history, and that it would be vain for us to investigate which of them predominates over all the others? We can only rejoice at the genuine and consistent materialists if they really are averse to dragging in the economic factor everywhere.”

Our reply to Mr. Kudrin is that, indeed, the genuine and consistent materialists really are averse to dragging in the economic factor everywhere. What is more, even to ask which factor predominates in social life seems to them pointless. But Mr. Kudrin need not hurry to rejoice. It was by no means under the influence of Messrs. the Narodniks and subjectivists that the genuine and consistent materialists arrived at this conviction. The objections these gentlemen raise to the domination of the economic factor are only calculated to evoke hilarity among the genuine and consistent materialists. What is more, these objections of our friends, the Narodniks and subjectivists, are rather belated. The inappropriateness of asking which factor

predominates in social life became very noticeable even in the time of Hegel. *Hegelian* idealism precluded the very possibility of such questions. All the more is precluded by modern dialectical materialism. Since the appearance of the *Critique of Critical Criticism*, and especially since the publication of Marx's well known *Critique of Political Economy*, only people backward in theory are capable of wrangling about the relative importance of the various historico-social factors. We are quite aware that Mr. Kudrin is not the only one who will be surprised at this, and so we hasten to explain.

What are the historico-social factors? How does the idea of them originate?

Let us take an example. The Gracchi tried to check the process of appropriation of the public domain by the wealthy Romans which was so fatal to Rome. The wealthy Romans resisted the Gracchi. A struggle ensued. Each of the contending sides passionately pursued its own aims. If I wanted to describe this struggle, I might depict it as a conflict of human passions. Passions would thus appear as "factors" in the internal history of Rome. But in this struggle both the Gracchi and their adversaries took advantage of the weapons furnished them by Roman public law. I would not fail, of course, to speak of this in my narrative, and thus Roman public law would also appear as a factor in the internal development of the Roman republic.

Further, the people who opposed the Gracchi had a material interest in preserving a deep-rooted abuse. The people who supported the Gracchi had a material interest in abolishing it. I would mention this circumstance, too, and as a result

the struggle I am describing would appear as a conflict of material interests, as a conflict of classes, a conflict of the poor and the rich. And so I already have a third factor, and this time the most interesting of all: the famous economic factor. If you have the time and inclination, dear reader, you may discuss at length which of the factors in the internal development of Rome predominated over the rest; you will find in my historical narrative sufficient data to support any opinion on this subject.

As for myself, as long as I stick to the role of simple narrator, I shall not worry much about the factors. Their relative importance does not interest me. As a narrator my one task is to depict the given events in as accurate and lively a manner as possible. For this purpose I have to establish a certain, even if only outward, connection between them, and to arrange them in a certain perspective. If I mention the passions that stirred the contending parties, or the system prevailing in Rome at the time or lastly, the inequality of property that existed there, I do so with the sole purpose of presenting a connected and lively account of the events. If I achieve this purpose, I shall be quite satisfied, and shall unconcernedly leave it to the philosophers to decide whether passions predominate over economics, or economics over passions, or, lastly, maybe, that nothing predominates over anything, each “factor” following the golden rule: Live and let live!

All this will be so as long as I stick to the role of simple narrator to whom all inclination to “subtle speculation” is foreign. But what if I do not stick to this role, and start philosophising about the events I am describing? I shall then not be satisfied with a mere outward connection of events; I

shall want to disclose their inherent causes; and those same factors – human passions, public law and economics – which I formerly stressed and gave prominence to, guided almost exclusively by artistic instinct, will now acquire a new and vast importance in my eyes. They will appear to me to be those sought-for inherent causes, those “latent forces,” to whose influence events are to be attributed. I shall create a theory of factors.

And, indeed, one or another variety of such a theory is bound to arise whenever people who are interested in social phenomena pass from simply contemplating and describing them to investigating the connections that exist between them.

The theory of factors, moreover, grows with the growing division of labor in social science. All the branches of this science – ethics, politics, jurisprudence, political economy, etc investigate one and the same thing: the activity of social man. But each investigates it from its own special angle. Mr. Mikhailovsky would say that each of them “controls” a special “chord.” Each of the “chords” may be regarded as a factor of social development. And, in fact, we may now count almost as many factors as there are distinct “disciplines” in social science.

We hope that what is meant by the historico-social factors and how the idea of them originates will now be clear.

A historico-social factor is an *abstraction*, and the idea of it originates as the result of a process of *abstraction*. Thanks to the process of abstraction, various *sides* of the social *complex* assume the form of separate *categories*, and the various manifestations and expressions of the activity of

social man – morals, law, economic forms, etc. – are converted in our minds into separate forces which appear to give rise to and determine this activity and to be its ultimate causes.

Once the theory of factors had come into being, disputes were bound to arise as to which factor was to be considered the predominant one.

III

The “factors” are subject to reciprocal action: each influences the rest and is in its turn influenced by the rest. The result is such an intricate web of reciprocal influences, of direct actions and reflected reactions, that whoever sets out to elucidate the course of social development begins to feel his head swim and experiences an unconquerable necessity to find at least some sort of clue out of the labyrinth. Since bitter experience has taught him that the view of reciprocal action only leads to dizziness, he begins to seek for another view: he tries to simplify his task. He asks himself whether one of the historico-social factors is not the prime and basic cause of all the rest. If he succeeded in finding an affirmative answer to this basic question, his task would indeed be immeasurably simplified. Let us suppose that he reaches the conviction that the rise and development of all the social relations of any particular country are determined by the course of its intellectual development, which, in its turn, is determined by the attributes of human nature (the idealist view). He will then easily escape from the vicious circle of reciprocal action and create a more or less harmonious and consistent theory of social development. Subsequently, as a result of a further stud of

the subject he may perhaps perceive that he was mistaken, and that man's intellectual development cannot be regarded as the prime cause of all social movement. Admitting his mistake, he will probably at the same time observe that his temporary conviction that the intellectual factor dominates over all the rest was after all of some use to him, for without it he could never have escaped from the blind alley of reciprocal action and would not have advanced a single step towards an understanding of social phenomena.

It would be unfair to condemn such attempts to establish some hierarchy among the factors of historico-social development. They were just as indispensable in their time as the appearance of the theory of factors itself was inevitable. Antonio Labriola, who has given a fuller and better analysis of this theory than any other materialist writer, quite rightly remarks that "the historic factors indicate something which is much less than the truth, but much more than a simple error." The theory of factors has contributed its mite to the benefit of science. "The separate study of the historico-social factors has served, like any other empirical study which does not transcend the apparent movement of things, to improve the instrument of observation and to permit us to find again in the facts themselves, which have been artificially abstracted, the keystones which bind them into the social *complexus*." Today a knowledge of the special social sciences is indispensable to anyone who would reconstruct any portion of man's past life. Historical science would not have got very far without philology. And the one-sided Romanists – who believed that Roman law was dictated by Reason itself – was it any mean service they rendered to science?

But however legitimate and useful the theory of factors may have been in its time, today it will not stand the light of criticism. It dismembers the activity of social man and converts its various aspects and manifestations into separate forces, which are supposed to determine the historical movement of society. In the development of social science this theory has played a part similar to that played by the theory of separate physical forces in natural science. The progress of natural science has led to the theory of the *unity* of these forces, to the modern theory of energy. In just the same way, the progress of social science was bound to lead to the replacement of the theory of factors, that fruit of social analysis, by a *synthetic view of social life*.

This synthetic view of social life is not peculiar to modern dialectical materialism. We already find it in Hegel, who conceived the task to be to find a scientific explanation of the entire historico-social process in its totality, that is, among other things, including all those aspects and manifestations of the activity of social man which people with an abstract cast of thought pictured as separate factors. But as an “absolute idealist,” Hegel explained the activities of social man by the attributes of the Universal Spirit. Given these attributes, the whole history of mankind is given *an sich*, and its ultimate results as well. Hegel’s synthetic view was at the same time a *teleological* view. Modern dialectical materialism has completely eliminated teleology from social science.

It has shown that man makes his history not in order to march along a line of predetermined progress, and not because he must obey the laws of some abstract (metaphysical, Labriola calls it) evolution. He does so in the

endeavour to satisfy his own needs, and it is for science to explain how the various methods of satisfying these needs influence man's social relations and spiritual activity.

The methods by which social man satisfies his needs, and to a large extent these needs themselves, are determined by the nature of the implements with which he subjugates nature in one degree or another; in other words, they are determined by the state of his productive forces. Every considerable change in the state of these forces is reflected in man's social relations, and, therefore, in his economic relations, as part of these social relations. The idealists of all species and varieties held that economic relations were functions of *human nature*; the dialectical materialists hold that these relations are functions of the *social productive forces*.

It therefore follows that if the dialectical materialists thought it permissible to speak of factors of social development with any other purpose than to criticise these antiquated fictions, they would first of all have to rebuke the so-called *economic* materialists for the *inconstancy* of their "predominant" factor; the modern materialists do not know of any economic system that would be alone conformable to human nature, all other social economic systems being the result of one or another degree of violence to human nature. The modern materialists teach that any economic system that is conformable to the state of the productive forces at the given time is conformable to human nature. And, conversely, any economic system begins to contradict the demands of human nature as soon as it comes into contradiction with the state of the productive forces. The "predominant" factor is thus found to be

itself *subordinate* to another “factor.” And that being the case, how can it be called “predominant”?

If that is so, then it is evident that a veritable gulf divides the dialectical materialists from those who not without justification may be called *economic* materialists. And to what trend do those altogether unpleasant disciples of a not altogether pleasant teacher belong whom Messrs. Kareyev, N. Mikhailovsky, S. Krivenko and other clever and learned people quite recently attacked so vehemently, if not so happily? If we are not mistaken, the “disciples” fully adhered to the view of dialectical materialism. Why then did Messrs. Kareyev, N. Mikhailovsky, S. Krivenko and the other clever and learned people father on them the views of the *economic* materialists and fulminate against them for supposedly attaching exaggerated importance to the economic factor? It may be presumed that these clever and learned people did so because the arguments of the late lamented economic materialists are easier to refute than the arguments of the dialectical materialists. Again, it may be presumed that our learned opponents of the “disciples” have but poorly grasped the latter’s views. This presumption is even the more probable one.

It may be objected that the “disciples” themselves sometimes called themselves economic materialists, and that the term “economic materialism” was first used by one of the French “disciples.” That is so. But neither the French nor the Russian “disciples” ever associated with the term “economic materialism” the idea which our Narodniks and the subjectivists associate with it. We have only to recall that in the opinion of Mr. N. Mikhailovsky, Louis Blanc and Mr. Y. Zhukovsky were “economic materialists” just like our

present-day supporters of the materialist view of history. Confusion of concepts could go no further.

IV

By entirely eliminating teleology from social science and explaining the activity of social man by his needs and by the means and methods of satisfying them, prevailing at the given time, dialectical materialism for the first time imparts to this science the “strictness” of which her sister – the science of nature – would often boast over her. It may be said that the science of society is itself becoming a *natural science*: “*notre doctrine naturaliste d’histoire*,” as Labriola justly says. But this does not mean that he merges the sphere of biology with the sphere of social science. Labriola is an ardent opponent of “*Darwinism, political and social*,” which “has, like an epidemic, for many years invaded the mind of more than one thinker, and many more of the advocates and declaimers of sociology,” and as a fashionable habit has even influenced the language of practical men of politics.

Man is without doubt an animal connected by ties of affinity to other animals. He has no privileges of origin; his organism is nothing more than a particular case of general physiology. Originally, like all other animals, he was completely under the sway of his natural environment, which was not yet subject to his modifying action; he had to adapt himself to it in his struggle for existence. In Labriola’s opinion races are a result of such – direct – adaptation to natural environment, in so far as they differ in physical features – as, for example, the white, black and yellow races – and do not represent secondary historico-social

formations, that is to say, nations and peoples. The primitive instincts of sociability and the first rudiments of sexual selection similarly arose as a consequence of adaptation to natural environment in the struggle for existence.

But our ideas of “primitive man” are merely conjectures. All men who inhabit the earth today, like all who in the past were observed by trustworthy investigators, are found, and were found, already quite a long way removed from the moment when man ceased to live a purely animal life. The Iroquois Indians, for example, with their *maternal gens* studied and described by Morgan had already made a comparatively big advance along the road of *social* development. Even the present-day Australians not only have a language which may be called a condition and instrument, a cause and effect of social life – are not only acquainted with the use of fire, but live in societies possessing a definite structure, with definite customs and institutions. The Australian tribes have their own territory and their art of hunting; they have certain weapons of defence and attack, certain utensils for the preservation of supplies, certain methods of ornamenting the body; in a word, the Australian already lives in a definite, although to be sure, very elementary, *artificial* environment, to which he accordingly adapts himself from earliest childhood. This artificial social environment is an essential condition for all further progress. The degree of its development serves as a measure of the degree of savagery or barbarism of all other tribes.

This primary social formation corresponds to what is called *the prehistory* of man. The beginning of historical life presumes an even greater development of the artificial

environment and a far greater power of man over nature. The complex internal relations of societies entering on the path of historical development are by no means due to the immediate influence of natural environment. They presuppose the invention of certain implements of labor, the domestication of certain animals, the ability to extract certain metals, and the like. These implements and means of production changed in very different ways in different circumstances; they showed signs of progress, stagnation, or even retrogression, but never have these changes returned man to a purely animal life, that is, to a life directly influenced by the natural environment.

“Historical science has, then, as its first and principal object the determination and investigation of this artificial foundation, its origin, its composition, its changes and its transformations. To say that all this is only a part and prolongation of nature is to say a thing which by its too abstract and too generic character has no longer any meaning.”

Critical as he is of “political and social Darwinism,” Labriola is no less critical of the efforts of certain “amiable dilettantes” to combine the materialist conception of history with the theory of universal evolution, which, as he harshly but justly remarks, many have converted into a mere metaphysical metaphor. He also scoffs at the naivete of “amiable dilettantes” in trying to place the materialist conception of history under the patronage of the philosophy of Auguste Comte or Spencer: “which is to say that they wish to give us for our allies our most open adversaries,” he says.

The remark about dilettantes evidently refers, among others, to Professor Enrico Ferri, the author of a very superficial book entitled *Spencer, Darwin and Marx*, which has been

published in a French translation under the title *Socialisme et science positive*.

V

Thus, man makes history in striving to satisfy his needs. These needs, of course, are originally imposed by nature; but they are later considerably modified quantitatively and qualitatively by the character of the artificial environment. The productive forces at man's disposal determine all his social relations. First of all, the state of the productive forces determines the relations in which men stand towards each other in the social process of production, that is, their *economic relations*. These relations naturally give rise to definite interests, which are expressed in *Law*. "Every system of law protects a definite interest," Labriola says. The development of productive forces divides society into classes, whose interests are not only different, but in many – and, moreover, essential – aspects are diametrically antagonistic. This antagonism of interests gives rise to conflicts, to a struggle among the social classes. The struggle results in the replacement of the *tribal* organisation by the *state* organisation, the purpose of which is to protect the dominant interests. Lastly, social relations, determined by the given state of productive forces, give rise to common *morality*, the morality, that is, that guides people in their common, everyday life.

Thus the law, the state system and the morality of any given people are determined *directly and immediately* by its characteristic economic relations. These economic relations also determine – but *indirectly and mediately* – all the creations of the mind and imagination: art, science, etc.

To understand the history of scientific thought or the history of art in any particular country, it is not enough to be acquainted with its economics. One must know how to proceed from economics to *social psychology*, without a careful study and grasp of which a materialist explanation of the history of ideologies is impossible.

That does not mean, of course, that there is a social soul or a collective national "spirit," developing in accordance with its own special laws and manifesting itself in social life. "That is pure mysticism," Labriola says. All that the materialist can speak of in this case is the prevailing state of sentiment and thought in the particular social class of the particular country at the particular time. This state of sentiment and thought is the result of social relations. Labriola is firmly persuaded that it is not the forms of man's consciousness that determine the forms of his social being, but, on the contrary, the forms of his social being that determine the forms of his consciousness. But once the forms of his consciousness have sprung from the soil of social being, they become a part of history. Historical science cannot limit itself to the mere anatomy of society; it embraces the *totality of phenomena* that are *directly or indirectly* determined by social economics, including the work of the imagination. There is no historical fact that did not owe its origin to social economics; but it is no less true to say that there is no historical fact that was not preceded, not accompanied, and not succeeded by a definite state of consciousness. Hence the tremendous importance of social psychology. For if it has to be reckoned with even in the history of law and of political institutions, in the history of literature, art, philosophy, and so forth, not a single step can be taken without it.

When we say that a given work is fully in the spirit of, let us say, the Renaissance, it means that it completely corresponds with the then prevailing sentiments of the classes which set the tone in social life. So long as the social relations do not change, the psychology of society does not change either. People get accustomed to the prevailing beliefs, concepts, modes of thought and means of satisfying given aesthetic requirements. But should the development of productive forces lead to any substantial change in the economic structure of society, and, as a consequence, in the reciprocal relations of the social classes, the psychology of these classes will also change, and with it the “spirit of the times” and the “national character.” This change is manifested in the appearance of new religious beliefs or new philosophical concepts, of new trends in art or new aesthetic requirements.

Another thing to be borne in mind, in Labriola’s opinion, is that in ideologies a very important part is often played by *the survivals* of concepts and trends inherited from earlier generations and preserved only by tradition. Furthermore, ideologies are also influenced by nature.

As we already know, the artificial environment very powerfully modifies the influence of nature on social man. From a *direct* influence, it becomes an *indirect* influence. But it does not cease to exist for that. The temperament of every nation preserves certain peculiarities, induced by the influence of the natural environment, which are to a certain extent modified, but never completely destroyed, by adaptation to the social environment. These peculiarities of national temperament constitute what is known as *race*. Race exercises an undoubted influence on the history of

some ideologies – art, for example; and this still further complicates the already far from easy task of explaining it scientifically.

VI

We have set forth in fair detail, and, we hope, accuracy, Labriola's view that social phenomena depend on the economic structure of society, which, in its turn, is determined by the state of its productive forces. For the most part, we are in full agreement with him. But in places his views give rise to certain doubts, concerning which we would like to make a few remarks.

To take the following point to begin with. According to Labriola, the state is an organisation for the rule of one social class over another or others. That is so. But it scarcely expresses the whole truth. In states like China or ancient Egypt, where civilised life was impossible without highly complex and extensive works for the regulation of the flow and overflow of big rivers and for irrigation purposes, the rise of the state may be largely explained by the direct influence of the needs of the social productive process. There can be no doubt that inequality, in one or another degree, existed in these countries even in prehistoric times, both within the tribes that went to constitute the state – which often differed completely in ethnographical origin – and among the tribes. But the ruling classes we meet with in the history of these countries held their more or less exalted social position owing to the state organisation called into being by the needs of the social productive process. There is scarcely room for doubt that the Egyptian priestly caste owed their supremacy to the highly important part which

their rudimentary scientific knowledge played in the system of Egyptian agriculture. (One of the Chaldean kings says “I have mastered the secrets of the rivers for the benefit of man...I have led the waters of the rivers into the wilderness; I have filled the parched ditches with them...I have watered the desert plains; I have brought them fertility and abundance. I have turned them into habitations of joy.” For all its boastfulness, this is a fairly accurate description of the role of the oriental state in organising the social process of production.) In the West – where Greece, of course, must be included – we do not observe that the direct needs of the social process of production, which there did not entail any extensive social organisation, had any influence on the rise of the state. But even there the appearance of the state must in a large measure be attributed to the need for a social division of labour called forth by the development of the social productive forces. This, of course, did not prevent the state from being at the same time an organisation of the rule of a privileged minority over a more or less enslaved majority. (Just as in certain cases it did not prevent it from being an outcome of the conquest of one people by another. Force plays a big part in the replacement of old institutions by new. But force can in no way explain either the possibility of such a replacement or its social consequences.) But it must not be lost sight of under any circumstances, if an incorrect and one-sided idea of the historical role of the state is to be avoided.

And now let us examine Labriola’s views on the historical development of ideologies. We have seen that in his opinion this development is complicated by the action of racial peculiarities and by the influence exercised on man by his natural environment generally. It is a great pity that our

author did not think it necessary to support and explain this opinion by any illustrations; it would have made it easier for us to understand him. At any rate, it is clear that it cannot be accepted in the form in which he expounds it.

The American redskin tribes do not, of course, belong to the same race as the tribes which in prehistoric times inhabited the Greek archipelago or the Baltic coast. It is beyond question that in these different localities primitive man experienced the influences of the natural environment in very different ways. It might have been expected that these different influences would be reflected in the rudimentary art of the primitive inhabitants of the localities mentioned. Yet we do not observe this to be the case. In all parts of the earth, however much they may differ from each other, we find similar stages in the development of art corresponding to similar stages in the development of primitive man. We know of the art of the Stone Age and of the art of the Iron Age; but we do not know of any distinctive arts of the different races: white, yellow, etc. The state of the productive forces is reflected even in details. For example, in pottery ornamentations we first meet only with straight and broken lines: squares, crosses, zigzags, etc. This form of ornamentation was borrowed by primitive art from the even more primitive handicrafts: weaving and plaiting. In the Bronze Age, with the appearance of the art of working metals, which are capable of assuming all sorts of geometrical shapes, we observe the appearance of curved ornamentations. And, lastly, with the domestication of animals, their figures, and especially the figure of the horse, make their appearance.

To be sure, in the depictions of human beings, the influence of racial features was bound to affect the “ideals of beauty” peculiar to the primitive artists. We know that every race, especially in its early stages of social development, considers itself the most beautiful, and rates very highly the features that distinguish it from other races. But, firstly, the influence of these peculiarities of racial aesthetics – as far as they have any permanency at all – cannot alter the course of development of art; and, secondly, these peculiarities themselves have only a temporary durability, lasting, that is, only as long as certain definite conditions prevail. When a tribe is forced to admit the superiority of another, more developed, tribe, its racial complacency tends to disappear and gives place to an imitation of alien tastes which were formerly considered ridiculous or even shameful and disgusting. Here we find occurring to the savage what occurs to the peasant in civilised society, who at first scoffs at the manners and dress of the town-dweller, and then, with the growing supremacy of the town over the country, tries to copy them to the best of his ability.

Passing to historical nations, we must first point out that in relation to them the word race cannot and should not be used at all. We do not know of any historical nation that can be regarded as racially pure; each of them is the product of an extremely lengthy and intense process of interbreeding and intermingling of different ethnic elements.

Now try, after this, to determine the influence of “race” on the history of the ideologies of any nation! At a first glance it seems that nothing could be simpler and more correct than the idea that natural environment influences national temperament and, through temperament, the history of the

nation's intellectual and aesthetic development. But if Labriola had only recalled the history of his own country, he would have been convinced of the erroneousness of this idea. The modern Italians are surrounded by the same natural environment as that in which the ancient Romans lived, yet how unlike is the "temperament" of our modern tributaries of Menelik to the temperament of the stern conquerors of Carthage! If we were to undertake to explain the history of Italian art, for example, by the Italian temperament, we should very soon be confronted by the baffling question why this temperament, for its part, varied so profoundly at different times and in different parts of the Apennine Peninsula.

VII

The author of the "Essays on the Gogol Period in Russian Literature" says in one of his commentaries to the first volume of J. S. Mill's work on political economy: "We would not say that race has no significance whatever; the development of the natural and historical sciences has not yet reached such perfection of analysis as to enable us in most cases to say unreservedly: here that element is absolutely lacking. For all we know, this steel pen may contain a particle of platinum; it cannot be denied absolutely. All we can say is that chemical analysis shows that this pen contains such a quantity of undoubtedly steel particles that the portion of its composition that might consist of platinum is perfectly negligible; and even if such a portion did exist, it could be ignored for all practical purposes.... As far as practical action is concerned, you may treat this pen as you would steel pens in general. In just the same way, pay no attention in practical affairs to people's

race; treat them simply as people.... It may be that the race of a nation did have some influence in determining that its state today is what it is, and no other; it cannot be denied absolutely, historical analysis has not yet achieved mathematical and absolute accuracy; like present-day chemical analysis, it still leaves a small, a very small, residuum, which demands more subtle methods of investigation, methods that are still unavailable in the present state of science. But this residuum is very small. In the determination of the present state of any nation, such a large part was due to the action of circumstances that are in no way dependent on inherent tribal characteristics, that even if such peculiar qualities differing from general human nature do exist, the place left for their action is very small, immeasurably, microscopically small.”

We were reminded of these words when reading Labriola’s views on the influence of race on the history of man’s spiritual development. The author of the “Essays on the Gogol Period” was interested in the significance of race chiefly from the practical standpoint, but what he says should likewise be constantly borne in mind by those who are engaged in purely theoretical inquiries. Social science will gain greatly if we at last abandon the bad habit of attributing to race everything that seems incomprehensible in the spiritual history of a given nation. It may be that racial characteristics did have some influence on its history. But this hypothetical influence was probably so minute that it were better in the interests of the inquiry to regard it as nonexistent and to consider the peculiarities observed in the development of the given nation as the product of the special historical conditions in which that development took place, and not as a result of the influence of race. Needless to say,

in quite a number of cases we shall be unable to indicate what exactly were the conditions that gave rise to the peculiarities in which we are interested. But what does not yield to the methods of scientific investigation to-day may well yield to them tomorrow. As to references to racial characteristics, they are inconvenient because they terminate the investigation just at the point where it should begin. Why is the history of French poetry unlike the history of German poetry? For a very simple reason: the temperament of the French nation was such as not to permit of the rise of a Lessing, or a Schiller, or a Goethe. Well, thanks for the explanation; now it's all perfectly clear.

Labriola, of course, would have said that nothing was further from his mind than explanations of this sort, which explain nothing. And that would be true. Generally speaking, he is fully aware of their utter futility, and he also knows very well from what side a problem like the one we have instanced should be approached. But by granting that the spiritual development of nations is complicated by their racial characteristics, he ran the risk of leading his readers gravely astray and betrayed a readiness to make, even if only in minor particulars, certain concessions to the old way of thinking that are prejudicial to social science. It is against such concessions that our remarks are directed.

When we say that the view we are contesting as to the influence of race on the history of ideologies is an old one, it is not without good reason. It is nothing but a variation of a theory which was very prevalent in the last century, and which endeavoured to explain the whole course of history by the characteristics of human nature. This theory is absolutely incompatible with the materialist conception of

history. According to the new view, the nature of social man changes as social relations change. Consequently, the general characteristics of human nature can offer no explanation of history. But although an ardent and convinced believer in the materialist conception of history, Labriola also granted – if only in a very small degree – some truth to the old view. But it is not for nothing that the Germans say: “Wer A sagt, muss auch B sagen.” Having granted truth to the old view in one instance, Labriola had to grant it in others too. Need it be said that this combination of two diametrically opposite views was bound to impair the harmony of his world outlook?

VIII

The organisation of any given society is determined by the state of its productive forces. As this state changes, the social organisation is bound sooner or later to change too. Consequently, it is in a state of unstable equilibrium wherever the social productive forces are developing. Labriola quite rightly remarks that it is this instability, together with the social movements and the struggle of social classes to which it gives rise, that preserves man from mental stagnation. Antagonism is the principal cause of progress, he says, repeating the thought of a very well-known German economist. But right away he makes a reservation. It would be a great mistake, in his opinion, to suppose that men always and in all cases have a proper understanding of their situation and clearly perceive the social tasks with which it confronts them. “To suppose that,” he says, “is to suppose the improbable and, indeed, the unreal.”

We would request the reader to pay careful attention to this reservation. Labriola develops his thought as follows:

“Forms of law, political acts and attempts at social organisation were, and they still are, sometimes fortunate, sometimes mistaken, that is to say, disproportionate and unsuitable. History is full of errors; and this means that if all were necessary, granted the relative intelligence of those who have to solve a difficulty or to find a solution for a given problem, if everything in it had a sufficient reason, yet everything in it is not reasonable, in the sense which the optimists give to this word. To state it more fully, the determining causes of all changes, that is to say the modified economic conditions, have ended, and end, by causing to be found, sometimes through tortuous ways, the suitable forms of law, the appropriate political orders and the more or less perfect means of social adjustment. But it must not be thought that the instinctive wisdom of the reasoning animal has been manifested, or is manifested, definitely and simply, in the complete and clear understanding of all situations, and that we have left only the very simple task of following the deductive road from the economic situation to all the rest. Ignorance – which, in its turn, may be explained – is an important reason for the manner in which history has proceeded; and, to ignorance we must add the brutishness which is never completely subdued, and all the passions, and all the injustices, and the various forms of corruption, which were and are the necessary product of a society organised in such a way that, in it, the domination of man over man is inevitable.

From this domination falsehood, hypocrisy, presumption and baseness were and are inseparable. We may, without being utopians, foresee as we do in fact foresee, the coming of a society which, developing from the present society and from its very contrasts by the laws inherent in its historic development, will end in an association without class antagonisms...But that is the future and it is neither the present nor the past... Regulated production will eliminate from life the element of chance which, thus far, has been

revealed in history as a multiform cause of accidents and incidents.” There is a good deal of truth in all this. But, fantastically interwoven with error, truth itself here assumes the form of a not altogether felicitous paradox.

Labriola is undoubtedly right when he says that men do not always by far have a clear understanding of their social situation and are not always properly aware of the social tasks to which it gives rise. But when, on this basis, he talks of ignorance or superstition as being the historical cause of many forms of social life and many customs, he himself unwittingly reverts to the view point of the enlighteners of the eighteenth century.

Before speaking of ignorance as an important reason “for the manner in which history has proceeded,” he should have defined the precise sense in which this word may here be used. It would be a great mistake to think that this is self-evident. No, it is far from being as evident or as simple as it seems. Take France of the eighteenth century as an example. All intelligent representatives of the third estate had a burning desire for liberty and equality. In furtherance of this aim they demanded the abolition of many antiquated social institutions. But the abolition of these institutions implied the triumph of capitalism, which, as we now know very well, can scarcely be called the kingdom of liberty and equality. It may therefore be said that the lofty aim of the philosophers of the last century was not attained. It may likewise be said that the philosophers were unable to indicate the means for its attainment; and they may therefore be accused of ignorance, as they actually were by many utopian socialists.

Labriola himself is astonished at the contradiction between the real economic tendencies in France in those days and the ideals of its thinkers. "A singular spectacle and a singular contrast!" he exclaims. But what is there singular in it? And wherein lay the "ignorance" of the French enlighteners? Was it in the fact that their idea of the means of achieving universal happiness was not the same as ours today? But, after all, there could be no question of such means in those days – they had not yet been created by man's historical movement, or, more correctly by the development of his productive forces. Read Malby's "Doutes, proposes aux philosophies economistes," read Morelli's "Code de la nature," and you will find that in so far as these writers differed with the great majority of the enlighteners as to the conditions of human happiness, and in so far as they dreamed of the abolition of private property, they, firstly, came into obvious and crying contradiction with the most vital and general needs of the people of their times, and, secondly, vaguely conscious of this, they themselves regarded their dreams as utterly unrealisable. And, therefore, we once more ask – wherein lay the ignorance of the enlighteners? Was it in the fact that, while realising the social needs of their times and indicating the proper means of satisfying them (abolition of the old privileges, etc.), they attached an entirely exaggerated significance to these means, that is, as a way towards universal happiness? That is not such a preposterous ignorance; and, taking the practical view, it must even be admitted that it had its uses, for the more the enlighteners believed in the universal value of the reforms they demanded, the more energetically they were bound to fight for them.

Undoubtedly, the enlighteners betrayed ignorance in not being able to find the thread connecting their views and aspirations with the economic condition of France at that period, and not even suspecting that such a thread existed. They looked upon themselves as exponents of absolute truth. We know today that there is no such thing as absolute truth, that everything is relative, that everything is dependent on the conditions of time and place; but precisely for that reason, we should be very cautious in judging the “ignorance” of various historical periods. Their ignorance, to the extent that it is manifested in their characteristic social movements, aspirations and ideals, is also relative.

IX

How does law arise? It may be said that all law represents the supersession or modification of an older law or custom. Why are old customs superseded? Because they cease to conform to the new “conditions,” that is, to the new actual relations in which men stand towards each other in the social process of production. Primitive communism disappeared owing to the development of productive forces. However, productive forces develop but gradually. Hence the new actual relations of man to man in the social process of production also develop but gradually. And hence, too, the restrictiveness of the old laws or customs, and, consequently, the need to provide a corresponding legal expression of the new actual (economic) relations of men, also develop but gradually. The instinctive wisdom of the reasoning animal usually follows in the wake of these actual changes. If old laws hamper a section of society in attaining its material aims, in satisfying its urgent wants, it will infallibly, and with the greatest ease, become conscious of

their restrictiveness: this requires very little more intelligence than is necessary for the consciousness that tight shoes or heavy weapons are uncomfortable. But, of course, from being conscious of the restrictiveness of an existing law to consciously striving to abolish it is a very far cry. At first men simply try to get round it in each particular case. Let us recall what used to happen in our country in large peasant families, when, under the influence of nascent capitalism, new sources of earnings arose which were not equal for all members of the family. The customary family code thereupon became restrictive for the lucky ones who earned more than the others. But it was not so easy for these lucky ones to make up their minds to revolt against the old custom, and they did not do so all at once. For a long time they simply resorted to subterfuge, concealing part of their earnings from the elders. But the new economic system grew gradually stronger, and the old family life more and more shaken: those members of the family who were interested in its abolition grew bolder and bolder; sons more and more frequently separated off from the common household, and in the end the old custom disappeared and was replaced by a new custom, arising out of the new conditions, the new actual relations, the new economics of society.

Man's cognition of his situation more or less lags as a rule behind the development of the new actual relations which cause that situation to change. But it does keep in the wake of the actual relations. Where man's conscious striving for the abolition of old institutions and the establishment of a new legal system is weak, there the way for the new system has not yet been properly paved by the economics of the society. In other words, in history, lack of clear cognition – “the blunders of immature thought,” “ignorance” – not

infrequently signifies only one thing, namely, that the object to be cognised, that is, the new, nascent things, is still but poorly developed. And obviously, ignorance of this kind – lack of knowledge or understanding of what does not yet exist, of what is still in process of becoming – is only relative ignorance.

There is another kind of ignorance – ignorance of nature. That may be called absolute ignorance. Its criterion is nature's power over man. And as the development of productive forces signifies the increasing power of man over nature, it is clear that any increase in productive forces implies a diminution in absolute ignorance. Natural phenomena which man does not understand and therefore cannot control give rise to various kinds of superstition. At a certain stage of social development, superstitions become closely interwoven with man's moral and legal ideas, to which they then lend a peculiar hue. (Mr. M. Kovalevsky, in his "Law and Custom in the Caucasus," says: "An examination of the religious beliefs and superstitions of the Ishavs leads us to conclude that, beneath the official cover of Orthodox religion, this people is still at the stage of development which Tylor has so happily called animism. This stage, as we know, is usually marked by the decided subordination of both social morality and law to religion." (Vol. II, p. 82.) But the fact of the matter is that, according to Tylor, primitive animism has no influence either on morals or on law. At this stage of development "there is no reciprocal relation between morality and law, or else this relation is only embryonic... The animism of the savage is almost completely exempt from that moral element which in the eyes of civilised man is the essence of every practical religion.... Moral laws have their own special foundation,

etc.” Hence it would be more correct to say that religious superstitions become interwoven with moral and legal ideas only at a certain, and relatively high, stage of social development. We very much regret that we are unable from considerations of space to show here how this is explained by modern materialism.) In the process of the struggle – called forth by the development of the new actual relations of men in the social process of production – religious views often play a very important part. Both the innovators and the conservatives invoke the aid of the gods, placing various institutions under their protection or even claiming that they are an expression of divine will. It goes without saying that the Eumenides, whom the ancient Greeks regarded as the upholders of the mother right, did as little in its defence as Minerva did for the triumph of the power of the father, which was supposedly so dear to her heart. Men simply wasted their time and effort in calling upon the aid of gods and fetishes; but the ignorance which made belief in the Eumenides possible did not prevent the Greek conservatives of the time from realising that the old legal system (or, more precisely, the old customary law) was a better guarantee of their interests. Similarly, the superstition that permitted the innovators to base their hopes on Minerva did not prevent them from realising the inconvenience of the old order of life.

The use of the wedge in the cutting of wood was unknown to the Dayaks of Borneo. When the Europeans introduced it, the native authorities solemnly banned its use. That evidently was a proof of their ignorance, for what could be more senseless than refusing to use a tool that helps to lighten labour? But just think a little, and you win perhaps grant that there may have been extenuating circumstances.

The ban on the employment of European tools was probably one manifestation of the struggle against European influences, which were beginning to undermine the old aboriginal order. The native authorities had a vague apprehension that if European customs were introduced, not a single stone of that order would be left standing. For some reason the wedge was more suggestive in their minds of the destructive power of European influences than any other European implement. And so we find them solemnly prohibiting its use. Why precisely was it the wedge that came to be the symbol of dangerous innovations in their eyes? To that question we may furnish a sufficient answer; we do not know why the wedge associated itself in the minds of the natives with the idea of the danger that menaced their old form of life; but we can say with certainty that the natives were perfectly right in fearing for the stability of their old order. European influences do very rapidly and very seriously impair – if not altogether destroy – the customs of the savages and barbarians who fall beneath their sway.

Tylor tells us that while the Dayaks publicly condemned the use of the wedge, they nevertheless used it when they could do so in secret. Here you have “hypocrisy” added to ignorance. But why? It was evidently due to a recognition of the advantages of the new method of cutting wood, accompanied, however, by a fear of public opinion, or of prosecution by the authorities. Thus we find the instinctive wisdom of the reasoning animal criticising the very measure for which it itself was responsible. And it was right in its criticism, for prohibiting the use of European tools by no means meant eliminating European influences.

We might borrow Labriola's expression and say that in this instance the Dayaks adopted a measure which was unsuitable and disproportionate to their situation. We would be perfectly right. And we might add to Labriola's remark that people very often devise measures that are disproportionate and unsuitable to their situation. But what follows? Only that we must try to discover whether some sort of dependence does not exist between this kind of mistake and the character or degree of development of man's social relations. Such a dependence undoubtedly does exist. Labriola says that ignorance may be explained in its turn. We say: not only can it be explained, but it should be explained, if social science is capable of becoming a strict science at all. If "ignorance" may be attributed to social causes, then there is no point in citing it, there is no point in saying that it explains the enigma why history proceeded thus and not otherwise. The answer lies not there, but in the social causes that gave rise to it and lent it one form rather than another, one character rather than another. Why restrict your investigation by simply talking about ignorance, which explains nothing?

Where a scientific conception of history is concerned, for the investigator to talk of ignorance only testifies to his own ignorance.

X

All positive law is a defence of some definite interest. How do these interests arise? Are they a product of human will and human consciousness? No, they are created by man's economic relations. Once they have arisen, interests are reflected in one way or another in man's consciousness. In

order to defend an interest, there must be consciousness of it. Hence every system of positive law may and should be regarded as a product of consciousness. It is not man's consciousness that calls into being the interests that the law protects, and, consequently, it is not man's consciousness that determines the content of law; but the state of social consciousness (social psychology) in the given era does determine the form which the reflection of the given interest takes in the mind of man. Unless we take the state of the social consciousness into account we shall be absolutely unable to explain the history of law.

In this history, it is always essential to draw a careful distinction between form and content. In its formal aspect, law, like every ideology, is subject to the influence of all, or at least of some of, the other ideologies: religious beliefs, philosophical concepts, and so on. This in itself hinders to some extent – and sometimes to a very large extent – the disclosure of the dependence between men's legal concepts and their mutual relations in the social process of production. But that is only half the trouble.

The real trouble is that at different stages of social development a given ideology is subject to the influences of other ideologies in very unequal degrees. For example, ancient Egyptian, and partly Roman, law was under the sway of religion; in more recent history law has developed (we repeat, and request it to be noted, that we are here speaking of the formal aspect) under the strong influence of philosophy. Philosophy had to put up a big fight before it succeeded in eliminating the influence of religion on law and substituting its own influence. This fight was nothing but a reflection in the realm of ideas of the social struggle between

the third estate and the clergy, but, nevertheless it greatly hampered the formation of a correct view of the origin of legal institutions, for, thanks to it, these institutions seemed to be the obvious and indubitable product of a struggle between abstract ideas. It goes without saying that, generally speaking, Labriola perfectly realises what kind of actual relations are concealed behind such a conflict of concepts. But when he comes to particulars, he lays down his materialist weapons in the face of the difficulties of the problem and considers it possible, as we have seen, to confine oneself to adducing ignorance or the power of tradition as an explanation. What is more, he speaks of “symbolism” as the final cause of many customs.

It is true that symbolism has been a factor of no little importance in the history of certain ideologies. But as the final cause of customs it will not do at all. Let us take an example like the following. Among the Ishavs of the Caucasus it is the custom for a woman to cut off her braid of hair on the death of a brother, but not on the death of her husband. This is a symbolical act; it is a substitution for the older custom of self-immolation on the grave of the dead man. But why does the woman perform this symbolical act on the grave of a brother and not on the grave of her husband? Mr. Kovalevsky says that this feature “can only be regarded as a survival from those remote times when the chief of the clan – which was united by its real or imaginary descent from a woman, the foremother of the clan – was the oldest descendant on the mother’s side, the nearest cognate.” It therefore follows that symbolical acts are comprehensible only when we understand the meaning and origin of the relations they symbolise. How do these relations arise? The answer to this question must not be

sought, of course, in symbolical acts, although they may sometimes furnish useful clues. The origin of the symbolical custom by which a woman cuts off her braid on the grave of a brother is to be explained by the history of the family; and the explanation of the history of the family is to be sought in the history of economic development.

In the case with which we are concerned – when the woman cuts off her braid on the grave of a brother – this rite has survived the form of kinship to which it owed its origin. There you have an example of that influence of tradition of which Labriola speaks. But tradition can only preserve what already exists. It not only fails to explain the origin of the given rite or of the given form in general, but even fails to explain its preservation. Force of tradition is a force of inertia. When examining the history of ideologies we are often constrained to ask ourselves why a particular rite or custom should have survived when not only the relations to which it owed its origin, but other cognate customs or rites which originated in the same relations, disappeared. That is equivalent to asking why the destructive effect of the new relations spared just this particular rite or custom while eliminating others. To answer this question by talking about the force of tradition is nothing more than reiterating the question in an affirmative form. How are we to get out of the difficulty? By turning to social psychology.

Old customs begin to disappear and old rites to break down when men enter into new reciprocal relations. The conflict of social interests finds expression in a conflict between the new customs and rites and the old. No symbolical rite or custom, taken by itself, can influence the development of the new relations either positively or negatively. If the

conservatives passionately uphold the old customs, it is because in their minds the idea of an advantageous, precious and customary social system is firmly associated with the idea of these customs. If the innovators detest and scoff at these customs, it is because in their minds the idea of these customs is associated with the idea of restrictive, disadvantageous and objectionable social relations. Consequently, the whole point lies in an association of ideas. When we find that a particular rite has survived not only the relations which gave rise to it, but also cognate rites that arose from these same relations, we have to conclude that in the minds of the innovators it was not so strongly associated with the idea of the old, detested order as other customs were. Why so? To answer this question is sometimes easy, but at others it is quite impossible for lack of the necessary psychological data. But even when we are constrained to admit that the question is unanswerable – at least, in the existing state of our knowledge – we must nevertheless remember that the point does not lie in the force of tradition, but in definite associations of ideas produced by definite actual relations of men in society.

The history of ideologies is to a large extent to be explained by the rise, modification and breakdown of associations of ideas under the influence of the rise, modification and breakdown of definite combinations of social forces. Labriola has not given this side of the question all the attention it deserves. This is clearly shown in his view of philosophy.

XI

According to Labriola, in its historical development, philosophy partly merges with theology and partly represents the development of human thought in relation to the objects which come within the field of our experience. In so far as it is distinct from theology, it is occupied with the same problems as scientific investigation, in the proper sense of the term. In doing so, it either strives to anticipate science, by offering its own conjectural solutions, or simply summarises and submits to further logical elaboration the solutions already found by science. That, of course, is true. But it is not the whole truth. Take modern philosophy. Descartes and Bacon held that it was one of the most important functions of philosophy to multiply our scientific knowledge in order to increase man's power over nature. We accordingly find that in their time philosophy was occupied with the same problems as formed the theme of the natural sciences. It might, therefore, be thought that the solutions it furnished were determined by the state of natural science. But that is not quite the case. Descartes' attitude to certain philosophical questions, as, for example, the question of the soul, cannot be explained by the state of the natural sciences in those days; but this attitude can be well explained by the social state of France at the time.

Descartes made a strict distinction between the sphere of faith and the sphere of reason. His philosophy did not contradict Catholicism; on the contrary, it endeavoured to confirm some of its dogmas by new arguments. In this respect it was a good reflection of the sentiments of Frenchmen at that period. After the prolonged and sanguinary conflicts of the sixteenth century, a universal

desire for peace and order arose in France. In the realm of politics, this desire was expressed in a sympathy for the absolute monarchy; in the realm of thought, it was expressed in a certain religious tolerance and an anxiety to avoid all controversial questions that might recall the recent civil war. These were religious questions. So that they might be avoided, a line of demarcation had to be drawn between the realm of faith and the realm of reason. That, as we have said, was what Descartes did. But this demarcation was not enough. social peace demanded that philosophy solemnly admit the truth of religious dogma. And through Descartes this, too, was done. That is why the system of this thinker, although at least three-quarters materialistic, was sympathetically greeted by many ecclesiastics.

A logical sequel to the philosophy of Descartes was the materialism of La Mettrie. But idealistic conclusions might have been drawn from it just as readily. And if the French did not do so, there was a very definite social reason for it, namely the hostility of the third estate to the clergy of eighteenth-century France. Whereas the philosophy of Descartes sprang from a desire for social peace, the materialism of the eighteenth century was the herald of new social upheavals.

It will be seen from this alone that the development of philosophical thought in France is to be explained not only by the development of natural science, but also by the direct influence of developing social relations. This is revealed even more clearly when the history of French philosophy is carefully examined from another angle.

Descartes, as we already know, held that the chief purpose of philosophy was to increase man's power over nature. The French materialists of the eighteenth century held that their prime duty was to replace certain old concepts by new ones, on which normal social relations might be erected. The French materialists made practically no mention of increasing the social forces of production. That is a highly important difference. What was it due to?

The development of productive forces in France in the eighteenth century was being severely hampered by the antiquated social relations of production, by archaic social institutions. The abolition of these institutions was absolutely essential for the further development of the productive forces. And it was in their abolition that the whole meaning of the social movement in France of that period lay. In philosophy, the necessity for this abolition found expression in a struggle against antiquated abstract concepts which had sprung from the antiquated relations of production.

In the time of Descartes these relations were still by no means antiquated; like the social institutions which had sprung from them, they were not hindering but facilitating the development of productive forces. Hence it never occurred to anybody to abolish them. That is why philosophy set itself the direct task of increasing productive forces, this being the prime practical task of the nascent bourgeois society.

We say this in objection to Labriola. But it may be that our objection is superfluous, that he merely expressed himself inaccurately, while at bottom being in agreement with us.

We should be very glad if it were so; it is pleasant to have intelligent people agree with you.

And if he did not agree with us, we would regretfully repeat that this intelligent man is mistaken. In doing so we might be furnishing our subjectivist old gentlemen with an excuse for one more jibe to the effect that it is difficult to distinguish the “authentic” adherents of the materialist conception of history from the “unauthentic.” But our reply to the subjectivist old gentlemen would be: “they are jeering at themselves.” Anybody who has properly grasped the meaning of a philosophical system can easily distinguish its true adherents from the false. If our friends the subjectivists had taken the trouble to ponder over the materialist explanation of history, they would have known themselves who are the authentic “disciples,” and who are the impostors that take the great name in vain. But since they have not taken that trouble and never will, they must of necessity remain in perplexity. That is the common fate of all who fall behind and drop out of the marching army of progress.

Incidentally, a word about progress. Do you recall, dear reader, the days when the “metaphysicians” were abused, when the textbooks of philosophy were “Lewes” and partly Mr. Spasovich’s “manual of criminal law,” and when, for the benefit of “progressive” readers, special “formulas” were invented, so simple that even a child of tender age might understand them? What glorious days those were! But they are gone, they have vanished like smoke. “Metaphysics” is again beginning to attract Russian minds, “Lewes” is going out of use, and the celebrated formulas of progress are being universally forgotten. Today it is very rare even for the subjectivist sociologists themselves – now grown so

“venerable “ and “hoary” – to recall these formulas. It is noteworthy, for instance, that nobody recalled them even when there was apparently a most urgent need for them, namely when the argument was raging whether we could turn from the path of capitalism to the path of utopia.

Our utopians used to hide behind the skirts of a man who, while advocating his fantastic “popular industry,” at the same time claimed to be an adherent of modern dialectical materialism. Dialectical materialism, turned into a sophistry, thus proved to be the only weapon in the hands of the utopians worthy of any attention. In view of this, it would be very useful to discuss how “progress” is regarded by the adherents of the materialist conception of history. To be sure, this question has been repeatedly discussed in our press. But, firstly, the modern materialist view of progress is still not clear to many, and, secondly, in Labriola’s book it is illustrated by some very happy examples and explained by some very correct arguments, although, unfortunately, it is not expounded systematically and fully. Labriola’s arguments should be supplemented. We hope to do so at a more convenient opportunity. Meanwhile it is time to draw to a close.

But before laying down our pen, we would once more request the reader to remember that what is known as economic materialism, against which the objections – and very unconvincing ones at that – of our friends the Narodniks and subjectivists are directed, has very little in common with the modern materialist conception of history. From the standpoint of the theory of factors, human society is a heavy load which various “forces” – morality, law, economics, etc – drag each in its own way along the path of

history. From the standpoint of the modern materialist conception of history, the whole thing assumes a different aspect. It turns out that the historical “factors” are mere abstractions, and when the mist surrounding them is dispelled, it becomes clear that men do not make several distinct histories – the history of law, the history of morals, the history of philosophy, etc. – but only one history, the history of their own social relations, which are determined by the state of the productive forces in each particular period. What is known as the ideologies is nothing but a multiform reflection in the minds of men of this single and indivisible history.