

Foreword

During the summer months of 1982 three separate courses on the Theory and Practice of Dialectical Materialism were held at our Party's College of Marxist Education in Parwich, Derbyshire.

We are reprinting this in pamphlet form under the title 'Studies in Dialectical Materialism' so that those students who attended the courses, as well as, we hope, many potential new ones, can keep informed, as to the content of the work.

The 'Studies', it should be noted, were written in the summer and autumn of 1982. It is important to realise this because our aim is to improve our presentation and analysis of the 'dialectical method' in subsequent studies. This is especially so, as class tensions increase and the political perspectives for the conquest of power and the smashing of the capitalist state in Britain become more favourable.

We welcome all correspondence from students old and new on this series.

G Healy

5 October 1982

Subjective idealism today

THE DANGERS OF INDIVIDUALISM

LENIN's book *Materialism and Empiric Criticism* (Volume 14 of the Collected Works) is one of his most outstanding contributions to Marxism. It was an essential part of the theoretical preparation of the Bolshevik Party for the October Socialist Revolution of 1917.

Volume 14 is a book which either comes under the severest criticism or is ignored entirely by Stalinists and renegade Trotskyist grouplets, together with the host of opportunist sects inside or around the Labour Party.

If we consider Volumes 1, 14 and 38 of the Collected Works together, we have a trilogy of books of great importance for students of the dialectical and historical materialist method. Volume 14 reveals the important inner connections between the other two.

Lenin saw the dividing line between Marxism and opportunism through the way in which dialectical and historical materialism were correlated within their objective foundation of the material unity of the world. But a dividing line does exist between the two and it is important that we understand what it is, especially in relation to the process of Cognition.

Dialectics – Logic and the theory of knowledge in cognition

Dialectical Materialists get to know the world initially through a process of Cognition. It affects the sensory organs, producing sensation in the form of indeterminate mental images.

As forms of the motion and change of the external world, these images are processed as concepts of phenomena. Upon negation through their dissolution from the positive sensation into their abstract negative, they are negated again as the nature of semblance into positive semblance which is the theory of knowledge of a human being. During this interpenetration process, the images as thought forms are analysed through the science of thought and reason which is Dialectical Logic.

The materialist nature of concepts and categories was referred to by Lenin when he wrote: 'If everything develops, does not this also apply to the most general concepts and categories of thought? If not, it means that thinking is not connected with being. If it does, it means that there is a dialectics of concepts and a dialectics of cognition which has objective significance.' (Lenin's Collected Works, Volume 38, p256)

Marxism recognises and insists that the theory of knowledge incorporates the history of the sciences in addition to the knowledge revealed by the Historical Materialist method. Through this method, Marx established that the practical activity of all human beings which is known as Social Being exists independently of them and determines their social consciousness.

In this process of cognition we now have the combined use of three important sciences i.e. Dialectics, Dialectical Logic, and the Theory of Knowledge of Historical

Materialism. These must be understood as the component parts of the process of cognition as a whole.

A scientific grasp of the external world is also the scientific understanding of cognition as a process. The sciences involved must not be jumbled up together, because they represent different parts of a unified whole, whose parts are in self-relation to each other.

From synthesis, which is implicit in the science of dialectical perception, Dialectical Logic takes over and reveals concepts and categories for analysis, thereby activating the science and the theory of knowledge and historical materialism. Thus, the ever-changing material properties of thought in Dialectical Logic in self-relation between subject and object, coincide materially with the theory of knowledge.

Historical materialism as a method

Historical materialism is a method for the building of the Revolutionary Party, based upon the Cognition of its **object**, which is **society consisting of conscious human beings** with the will to go on changing the world independently of each other as individuals.

Lenin showed that such a development and change was a historically natural process which he placed on a scientific foundation as a source of **social theory**, incorporating the developments in the sciences. The scientific nature of social theory is generated from the essence of the material unity of nature in constant motion, which provides the conditions of life out of which develops the class struggle in society.

Marx referred to the historical implications of such essence as follows: “... in the social production of their life, men enter definite relations, ... *relations of production* which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces.

“The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.”, (*What the Friends of the People Are*, Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 1, p.138)

The **relations of production** are sometimes referred to as the mode of production, whilst the **material productive forces** may be called the means or the **tools of production**. These interacting opposites, as laws, constitute the objective nature of capitalist crisis.

Lenin recognised that Cognition of such an historically developing process as the relations between the activities of individual subjects of Cognition involved reflection, embodying the historical materialist method, as distinct from the Cognitive process in general. In a quotation from Marx, Lenin indicated some of the issues raised by this type of Cognition, which occurs when the **actuality** of the process of Cognition emerges.

“Just as our opinion of an individual is not based upon what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of

material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production.” ’ (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 1, p139)

It was common practice for the philosophers of the pre-Marxist period to study political and legal forms as if these were consciously established by men alone and not by the dialectical law-governed social relations existing independently of men.

Lenin described such an historical error as follows: □It never has been the case, nor is it so now, that the members of society conceive the sum total of the social relations in which they live as something definite, integral, pervaded by some principle; on the contrary, the mass of people adapt themselves to these relations unconsciously, and have so little conception of them as specific historical social relations that, for instance, an explanation of the exchange relations under which people have lived for centuries was found only in very recent times.

□Materialism removed this contradiction by carrying the analysis deeper, to the origin of man’s social ideas themselves; and its conclusion that the course of ideas depends on the course of things is the only one compatible with scientific psychology.’ (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 1, pages 139-140)

In singling out □production relations’, Historical Materialism provides an objective demonstration that such relations were nothing less than the □structure of society’, which distinguished one capitalist country from another.

The subjectivists, whilst admitting □that historical phenomena conform to law, were incapable of regarding their evolution as a process of natural history, precisely because they came to a halt before man’s social ideas and aims and were unable to reduce them to material social relations.’ (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume I, p.141)

The great achievement of Karl Marx

This was Marx’s great achievement, or, as Lenin explains it: □The reason *Capital* has enjoyed such tremendous success is that this book by a “German economist” showed the whole capitalist social formation to the reader as a **living thing** – with its everyday aspects, with the actual social manifestation of the class antagonism inherent in production relations, with the bourgeois political superstructure that protects the rule of the capitalist class, with the bourgeois ideas of liberty, equality and so forth, with the bourgeois family relationships.’ (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 1, page 141-142)

With the publication of *Capital* what had once been designated as historical hypothesis was now proved scientifically. □The gigantic step forward taken by Marx,’ said Lenin, □in this respect, consisted precisely in that he discarded all these arguments about society and progress in general and produced a *scientific* analysis of *one* society and of *one* progress – capitalist.’ (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 1, p.145)

In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx explains how, in his struggle to transcend the limitations of bourgeois theories of political economy, he utilised the empirical method: □... my results have been attained by means of a wholly empirical analysis based on a conscientious critical study of political economy.’ (See preface by Marx to the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*)

These Manuscripts, which first appeared in English in 1959 (Lenin never saw them), were the results of just such an empirical study, as a glance at their contents will reveal. They contain the *Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole*. Hegel, in his day, exerted a most powerful philosophical influence on the method of bourgeois political economy.

Marx's work on *Capital*, although he began it much later, was the historical outcome of his *Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole*. Such 'empirical' work can be seen from the inclusion in the appendix of Engel's *Outline of a Critique of Political Economy*, which was the latter's first economic work written in 1843. (See Volume 3, Collected Works of Marx and Engels, Progress Publishers, Moscow, distributed by Central Books Ltd., and obtainable at all Paperbacks Centres)

Lenin always insisted that it was through analysis and the generalisation of **empirical facts** that the ideological functions of social theory were revealed. In the process of Cognition, such analysis arises out of the **possibilities** which have their source in the qualitative objects and processes of the external world, in which the Appearance of the 'thing' is negated as an **abstract unity and identity of opposites**, whose substance generates the Necessity for such historically empirical investigation.

We extract from the facts of such situations, their essential characteristics thus establishing the historical frequency of their negation in differing social circumstances.

Subjective idealists counter such an analysis with their self-constructed images. But scientific analysis, Lenin stressed, must not be superseded by such subjective constructions.

Subjective idealism as a method

Subjective idealism as a method ignores the objective law-governed process of the world crisis of capitalism and social development. In pre-revolutionary Russia its most active supporters were the leaders of the Narodniks such as Mikhailovsky.

They insisted that society was the product of 'outstanding individuals' who were, in turn, 'critical thinkers', thus denying the decisive role of the working class in history. Such a method exercises a very powerful and reactionary influence within radical and middle-class circles and grouplets claiming to be Trotskyist in the working-class movement right now.

In their everyday practice, subjective idealists or solipsists equate the centralised role of the revolutionary party with that of the active self-sacrificing 'responsible individual'.

The creative and predominantly revolutionary role of the working class is, in the manner of Hegel's 'external world', formally acknowledged in the shape of some abstract category or absolute idea within the individual's thoughts.

Like the Revolutionary Party, it only exists **in** and **through** the mind of the individual, whose often times critical and speculative conclusions simply lead to an inconsistent practice derived from a constant reshuffling of his own subjectively created images to impose upon that practice, which altogether assumes a sub-ordinate role to what is going on in the mind of the subjective idealist.

To 'him' the working class may at times appear confused and passive in the face of the incessant onslaught of Thatcherite, Tory attacks on their trade unions, jobs and living standards. On the other hand, when the working class, through the use of the strike weapon, takes up the challenge in a limited way, he is inclined to perk up a bit only later to relapse into deeper pessimism if the strike is defeated.

If the strike is won he is pleased, until later, when the feeling has worn off he turns inwards towards himself once again and sceptically reappraises it as only one 'small pebble' on a very 'cold beach'.

The subjective idealist is invariably a blind activist, that is if he works at all. His only solution is to rely on his own self-erected, badly battered images of what must be done and 'soldier on regardless'. He invariably staggers on from strike to strike hoping for something to cheer him up, without recourse to revolutionary theory as a guide to practice.

The trouble with all this self-delusion is that after a time it gets boring with the 'subjective idealists' becoming more and more resigned to their own pessimism, believing it to be the result of some weakness and failure in themselves as individuals.

They imprison themselves deeper in their own images, becoming more and more isolated from the external world.

They become more and more careless towards their revolutionary responsibilities in the mistaken belief that whatever happens next will only reveal how 'hopeless' they are.

They drift towards positivist intuition and begin to unconsciously deliver blows against the Revolutionary Party, because they view the whole experience in a subjective-individualist way by failing to see that both 'our' Party and the working class historically predominate over the individual, as parts of the external world.

This idealist outlook is presently rampant in all revisionist groups, which explains a little of why in their boredom they join the Labour Party, and even convince themselves that it can be transformed into a revolutionary party, which is as good a way as any of saying that the 'immaculate conception' has been proved biologically.

All that it amounts to is that in the footsteps of the solipsist E. Mach, as Lenin explained, 'we sense only our sensations' (Lenin's Collected Works, Volume 14, page 43). 'From which,' Lenin goes on to write, 'there is only one possible inference, namely that the "world consists only of *my* sensations". The word "our" employed by Mach instead of "my" is employed illegitimately. By this word alone, Mach betrays that "half heartedness" of which he accuses others.

'For if the "assumption" of the existence of the external world is "idle", if the assumption that the needle exists independently of me and that an interaction takes place between my body and the point of the needle is really "idle and superfluous" then primarily the "assumption" of the existence of other people is idle and superfluous.

'Only I exist and all other people as well as the external world come under the category of the idle "nuclei". Holding this point of view, one cannot speak of "our" sensations; and when Mach does speak of them, it is only a betrayal of his own manifest half-heartedness. It only proves that his philosophy is a jumble of idle and empty words in which their author himself does not believe.' (Lenin's Collected Works, Volume 14, pages 43-44)

Individualism – An instrument of the ruling classes

To recognise the subjective idealist danger of starting from 'sensation', as if the external world were a 'complex of sensations', is not enough. We must be thoroughly conversant with the reactionary history of this bourgeois-ideological method, especially in relation to the situation in Britain at the present time.

Here, the ruling class does everything in its reactionary power to make ever larger groups of jobless workers, their families and youth in general entirely dependent upon the state as their sole means of life.

The anti-union laws are accompanied by reactionary propaganda concerning the 'sacred' 'rights' of non-unionists which are part of the same campaign. The real concern of the bourgeoisie is reserved for the sanctity of monopoly capital to use the element of unemployment to frighten those without jobs to undermine the trade union conditions and living standards of those with jobs.

The more the Tories can create a growing mood of 'individual hopelessness', the more they pave the way to deliver ever more powerful blows against the organised working class.

Theory is a guide to practice. It is only through the development of theory that we are able to understand the results of our practice. Theory as the activity of the subject of cognition is tested out in practice as the object of cognition.

The dialectical interaction between them constantly enriches theory by mentally reproducing reality in thought forms, whose source is in the external world, which, in turn, through constant analysis, enable us to improve our objective practice.

To overcome the problem of subjective idealism, we must consciously utilise the theory developed by the great Marxists through which the revolutionary party guides its practices in changing the external world. The individual members must submerge themselves in this work and understand that only in this way can the individual 'I' approach be overcome. The struggle to develop the theory and practice of the Party is the only way through which the problems and difficulties can be resolved and the reactionary element of subjectivism overcome.

Social being is independent of social consciousness

The most significant outcome of all the discoveries made by Marx, centres on the fact that mankind **itself** created its own objective conditions through the development of the productive forces. These in turn shape the development of society as a whole, independently of individual needs and wills.

There is no freedom of choice for people as far as the development of the productive forces are concerned. They are a creation by men, which towers over them generation after generation as a predominant objective force.

The main purpose of Marx's *Capital* was to discover the economic law from which he could cognise the movement of society. In doing so, he revealed that **social being** exists independently of **social consciousness**.

Lenin outlined such a process as follows: 'Every individual producer in the world economic system realises that he is introducing this or that change into the technique of production; every owner realises that he exchanges certain products for others; but

these producers and these owners **do not realise** that in doing so they are thereby changing **social being**.

‘The sum-total of these changes in all their ramifications in the capitalist world economy could not be grasped even by seventy Marxes. The most important thing is that the laws of these changes have been discovered; that the **objective logic** of these changes and their historical development has in its chief and basic features been disclosed – objective ... in the sense that social being is independent of the social consciousness of people.’ (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 14, p.325)

And on page 326 of Volume 14, he again stresses this point:

‘Materialism in general recognises objectively real being (matter) as independent of the consciousness, sensation, experience etc., of humanity. Historical materialism recognises social being as independent of the social consciousness of humanity. In both cases consciousness is only the reflection of being, at best an approximately true (adequate, perfectly exact) reflection of it. From this Marxist philosophy, which is cast from a single piece of steel, you cannot eliminate one basic premise, one essential part, without departing from objective truth, without falling prey to bourgeois-reactionary falsehood.’ (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 14, p.326)

The subjective idealist starts out from his consciously given ‘good intentions’. For him the external world is equal to his sensations and since in his undisclosed thought, he feels he means well, he wrongly assumes that all will be well in the world around him. Such an illusion is very easily shattered in the crisis-ridden political climate of today.

How the ruling class uses individualism’

The external world is liquidated into the individual’s sensations and from there he or she works on self-created images, which, since they don’t reflect the real world but only what the idealist has conjured up, they contain a **bourgeois reactionary falsehood’**.

For it is the capitalist class itself in its media which is the main source of such ideological ‘falsehoods’. With its great power and wealth it protects its class interests and privileges through the dissemination of carefully-calculated false images of what it considers to be right and wrong from the standpoint of its narrow and brutal class rule.

The most enthusiastic purveyors of such class filth are, of course, the upper and lower middle classes, who are groomed for the job in those schools and universities which make the whole affair seem positively decent and respectable from the standpoint of their grubby individual needs.

In the case of the Falkland Islands war, we have a good example of the way in which the ‘mind-benders’ of the media went about their work to invoke the memory of old imperialist traditions, which are mainly based upon downright lies.

There was the lie that the Tories were caught by surprise and were ‘utterly unprepared for the whole thing’. It is a matter of public knowledge that they have a number of permanent ‘hit’ squads amongst the military, such as the SAS and the Para units, always ready for such bloody affairs against the working class or anyone else that stands in their imperialist way.

On the grounds of traditional British muddle' and unpreparedness', they dragged unemployed dockyard workers and seamen back from the labour exchanges to risk their lives working all the anti-social hours imaginable.

On the basis of old-style patriotism distributed no longer in imperial pints' but through the BBC, ITV and Fleet Street etc, etc, the Labour leaders got so close to Thatcher that she bundled them into her personal bag so that the satisfying stink of the whole affair could be inhaled even during her most private moments.

Next in line were the trade union bureaucrats of the TUC who loudly proclaimed that the more they bowed to Thatcher's war, the more the possibility of some kind of deal over the anti-union laws could be worked out.

Rodgers of the Social Democratic Party flew the kite – but with no response from the Tories, who remain firmly indifferent to the whole affair. They, at least, know their cowardly men at the top in the trade unions and Labour Party.

Last, but not least, there were the United Nations resolutions against Argentina which were supposed to paste the law not war' stamp over the whole affair. This fell flat when a similar ceasefire' resolution from the United Nations on the Lebanon simply made Begin and Eitan more enthusiastic to wipe out the PLO by the most brutal means, without a single protest from the UN, the USA or even the Soviet bureaucracy.

How subjective idealism works

Over and over again in his *Materialism and Empirio Criticism*, Lenin insisted that sensations are images of the external world' and that things, the environment, the world, exist independently of our sensation'. On the other hand, If we mentally project ourselves' on the external world our presence will be imaginary. It is precisely the purpose of the theory to show the unreal, fantastic and reactionary character of such projections.' (See *Theory of Knowledge*, Lenin's Collected Works, Volume 14.)

Just as human beings need food and air from the external world in order to live, so also do they need the action of the external material world on their sense organs, in order to develop living thoughts.

As Marx said: A being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a **natural** being, and plays no part in the system of nature. Or a Being which is not itself an object for some third being has no being for its object i.e, it is not objectively related. Its being is not objective.' (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p.145)

The subjective idealist, who has liquidated the reality of the external world into his thought form of sensation; has in fact replaced the external world with his objectified self. It means that the thought form of **sensation** is man's **objectified** abode. He has mentally chosen not to live in the real world but in an out-of-date image of it.

From there on, the objects which appear in the mind are separated from the real world and from the possibility of real abstraction through external reflection whose source is the real world. Needless to say he ignores the process of Cognition.

The subjective idealist who, because he is a natural being, already in possession of sensuously acquired knowledge (self- consciousness), **for itself**', as the activity of the subject of cognition, now confronts the in itself' **objectified image** separated from the external world. Its only source is the abstract mind of the subject, who is now

objectified within it. In the process of Cognition, such an image constitutes the negative nature of semblance **in itself**.

As such, it would be negated again into the positive side of Semblance for itself' through the movement of external reflection (negation of the negation). But this dialectical process is now rendered impossible for the subjective idealist. He has replaced the source of external reflection by objectifying himself as if he were the external world' within his own sensation.

Subject as in itself now stands **opposed** to object for itself. Negation of the negation through external reflection is replaced by a transcending process in which the **fixed opposition** between abstract thought in itself', as subject, and the real sensuousness within thought for itself, as **object**, is overcome by the latter pasting its own image for itself' – over in itself', thus transcending the contradictions which in the process of cognition emerge between the two, when they interpenetrate into one another.

In this situation the subjective idealist views **the object** of the external world as an entity of thought, so **the object** can never appear as a **real object**. Sensation is a kind of external cloak' into which he has objectified himself.

When the cloak' in itself has been transcended countless times under conditions in which the subjective idealist has objectified himself inhumanly against himself, he goes on to establish connections with other idealists and their profane cloaks', thus intensifying the pasting over' of countless images derived from his speculative thought of what he imagines himself to be, in his objectified role, in relation to such kindred spirits.

The appearance of these exoteric cloaks', as Marx calls them, become more and more profane and polluted. Our idealists become frustrated, bitter, disappointed and bored, in a situation in which, mentally speaking, they are engaged in one long round of ego-bashing'.

Having exhausted the potential of their speculative thought, they run out of images' with which to plaster their, by now, well-polluted ego cloaks'. Eventually, they go squabbling amongst themselves in their lavishly produced (Internal) Eternal Bulletins, or they hop off to tell the world how they have been betrayed, hoping they will get a good job eventually from some media admirers.

The subjective-idealist who objectifies himself in the fixed image of sensation as his real abode, now occupies the inhuman position of straddling within himself both the external world of abstract consciousness in conflict with the real world of self-consciousness.

Real, living, dialectical abstraction from the external world resulting in his sensation is replaced by the fixed conflict between subject and object and leaves no room whatsoever for the dialectical logic of abstract reasoning.

What we have is the posited essence of the estrangement of the idealist from nature objectified in sensation' as the thing' to be superseded by self-consciousness. His essential powers have become objects'.

He has succeeded in appropriating himself in **pure thought** – in abstraction. Thus the object of Cognition is equal to the activity of the subject of Cognition which, as Marx explained, leads to a source of **false** positivism. (See Marx on Hegel – *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*)

The dangers of uncritical positivism

All that matters to the subjective idealist is his existing knowledge or consciousness. At first it appears that being able to make up his images as he goes along is to his advantage.

His consciousness, as Marx put it, (knowing as knowing, thinking as thinking) pretends to be directly the other of itself – to be the world of sense, the real world, life – thought surpassing itself in thought (Feuerbach). This aspect is contained herein, inasmuch as consciousness as mere consciousness takes offense not at estranged objectivity, but at objectivity as such.’ (Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p.148)

For our idealist, the emergence of his uncritical positivism’ means that reason (self-consciousness) appears to be at home in the unreason of objectified abstract consciousness. He leads his true life’ as Marx said, in this alienated life in which he has objectified himself.

He makes a pretence at being critical of his objectified image by wracking his brain for more suitable critical images to impose which as time goes by become more apparent’ than real. This is the heart of a false positivism’ or what Feuerbach called the positing, negating and re-establishing of religion or theology’. (Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p.148)

Our idealist is at the point where he is dragged along by this growing tendency towards a **false positivism**. He is already well on the way towards a philosophic dissolution of his objective existence and the restoration of the existing (sensuous) empirical world.

He becomes impatient with the lessons of the history of the revolutionary workers’ movement such as Marxism, Leninism, Trotskyism, etc. He wants to relate every problem in party building to the immediacy of what is happening today separated from its history and future perspectives.

He begins to feel we should junk the old Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist attitude towards dialectical and historical materialism as something which disturbs his more positive approach to be out and about building the party in a more practical way’. The trouble is he never really gets out and about’ to do anything because he regards this approach as a convenient ploy to become popular with politically weak-minded idealists like himself.

Whilst he keeps his idealist morale up by shouting louder and louder for action this day’ he is already becoming politically weaker, organisationally immobilised and softer towards the ideology of the class enemy, which has now well and truly trapped him.

Something has happened during his **positivist** trek back to his most recent discovery of the sensuous, empirical real world, and it is very important that we should know what that something is.

During the long years, as it were, when he remained objectified within his own image of sensation, he also managed to objectify the class struggle and the class enemy within the same image. Thus, when he adopts a false positivism, he still continues to view these forces as abstractions, which can be manipulated by his mind any way he likes.

He sees them now as abstract mind-boggling images on **his revolutionary way** into what he considers to be **the real world**. But this **real world** exists **only in his mind**, in which, by now he is the sole occupant. Our idealist becomes an angry individual and dangerously subjective when he feels that an emphasis on Dialectical and Historical materialist training is not only holding him back from real practical work, but disturbs him as well.

Whilst loudly proclaiming his hatred of the class enemy, he begins to feel at first perhaps with shock, that an **even more dangerous enemy** are **those who insist** that he is trained as a revolutionary Marxist fighter for the dialectical materialist method in the class struggle.

As he is called upon to leave the mental battlefield of the phantom armies of his brain where everything seems immediate and clear he is forced to speculate on anything under the sun, in order to get the upper hand over this new enemy' and come into the real world of the class struggle where, without revolutionary theory you can have no revolutionary practice.

It mistakenly seems to him that those who advocate such training are in his mind the real villains who must be exposed at all costs.

Our subjective idealist cum positivist has got everything upside down. There are, indeed, dangers ahead if we fail to recognise the reactionary role of subjective idealism.

Scientific cognition and the external world

THE ROLE of external reflection in the process of Cognition is often surrounded by unnecessary confusion. The main problem has its origin in the individual who mistakenly believes that he or she is the source of reflection in general, when in reality its source is in the external world. What follows appears to be a reflective relation between the individual and the external world, although, in fact, it is the other way around. External reflection has its source in the world existing independently of the individual.

The external world, which is described by the concept of **universality** manifests itself through the category of external reflection in the physical concept of the sensation of an individual. It is the content of the external world in self-relation to the individual which is the source of external reflection and which stirs in scientific cognition', (Lenin's Collected Works, Volume 38, p.87). At the same time,' wrote Lenin, it is this very **reflection of the content** which itself initially posits and produces its determination.' (ibid – my emphasis) Lenin insisted that to understand this movement of scientific cognition' is the essential thing'.

The role of the senses in cognition

The direction of the movement of scientific cognition' referred to here is from the low' to the high'. There are various forms of reflection and various forms of motion. The origin of the connection of the forms of motion are also the origins of the forms of reflection. Whilst these contain the **lower**, they cannot be **reduced to its level**.

The relevant sense organs are attracted to the excitation whose source is in the external world, or, as Lenin explains: For every scientist who has not been led astray by professorial philosophy, as well as for every materialist, sensation is indeed the direct connection between consciousness and the external world; it is the transformation of the energy of external excitation into the fact of consciousness.' (Lenin's Collected Works, Volume 14, p. 51). This external excitation' provides, in effect, a correct orientation between the combination of senses involved and the external world. Whilst it can only be reflected approximately and incompletely, these reflections are nevertheless objectively accurate.

The dialectical nature of external reflection contains both the positive and the negative moments through which, as we have seen, the content of the external stirs' as the **object of cognition**'. **Both the object of cognition** and the **activity of the subject** of cognition are two aspects of the functioning of a dialectical human being. **As the object of cognition**, it is both the content and material mode of existence of the source of external reflection, which either, in an active or passive way, acts upon and influences the sense organs concerned. It must be understood that the external source of reflection is itself an active agent in the cognition process.

In turn the activity of the subject of cognition reacts in a sensuous and dialectical way to this subject/object relationship. Whilst sensations reflect only the external image of things, dialectical logic, with its abstract concepts, penetrates to the very essence of things and discovers the necessary connections between the phenomena.

‘Essentialities’ of Cognition

The movement of consciousness and thought cannot and must not be separated from the movement of the external world of nature. It rests, as Lenin explained, on the nature of pure essentialities’. (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 38, p. 88). Idealist philosophers seek to create a dualist separation between thought and nature as if thought existed independently of nature. They argue as if thought and logic have their own forms of activity, implying that forms of thought have their sources in some non-material, supernatural world.

‘And concerning forms of thought,’ wrote Lenin, ... it cannot be said that they serve us, for they permeate “all our ideas”, they are “**the Universal as such**”.’ (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 38, p.91. My emphasis). He comments as follows: Objectivism: the categories of thought are not an auxiliary tool of man, but an expression of laws both of nature and of man – compare further the antithesis... We cannot “get beyond the nature of things”,’ he stressed when referring to the antithesis’ of subjective thinking’ and the objective concept of the very essence of things’. (ibid)

Thoughts are a product of matter and can only exist in material nature, which is their source. Logic,’ wrote Lenin, is the science, not of external forms of thought, but of the laws of development “of all material, natural and spiritual things,” i.e. of the development of the entire concrete content of the world and of its cognition i.e. the sum-total, the conclusion of the history of knowledge of the world.’ (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 38, pp92-93).

Since the content of external reflection is that of the inorganic external world, it manifests itself at first only in an **indeterminate way**. Later, in the process of cognition, this **indeterminateness** is transformed into **determinateness**. For example, it implicitly contains **Reason**, which, as Lenin explains, is negative and dialectical because it dissolves into nothing’. (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 38, pp87-88).

Later, through negation of negation, it becomes reason which understands’ (negative nature of semblance) in a positive combination with understanding which reasons’ (positive nature of semblance). The concept of semblance therefore, constitutes the unity of the logical through its **negative nature** and the **historical** which is incorporated into **positive semblance**.

Concepts not only reflect reality, but their history as concepts as the object of knowledge is derived from the external world as universal. The content of consciousness is the individual **as the universal**.

Dialectical logic develops in accordance with the necessity which is generated from its content of the external world. The forms of images which it perceives from the real world have as their content also the real world. Our sensations, our consciousness, is only an image of the external world.’ (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 14, p.69). For method is the consciousness of the form taken by the inner spontaneous movement of its content.’ (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 38, p.96). Lenin referred to such a process evolving in the following objective way.

‘1. Necessary connection, the objective connections of all the aspects, forces, tendencies, etc, of the given sphere of phenomena;

2. The “immanent emergence of distinctions” – the inner objective logic of evolution and of the struggle of the differences, polarity.’ (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 38, p.97).

Physical sensation occurs where there is only one sense organ involved, whereas living perception is a synthesis from many sense organs. We establish the necessary connections between them because the universal laws of the motion of the external world and human thought are identical.

The immanent emergence of distinctions’ are best understood through the motion of the external world in time and space. Everything is changing, and no one moment of time can be the same as the previous one. Therefore, as the constant changes build up and establish a synthesis with the knowledge we already have, distinctions will appear, and must appear, as the structural levels of matter due to these changes become more numerous.

There are various forms of reflection which have their external sources in either passive or active conditions in the external world. They differ not only in a gradual way as a slow build-up of properties is taking place quantitatively – they also, at a certain point, become transformed qualitatively. The law of quantity into quality and vice versa in forms of thought reflects the content of the movement of the external world.

‘Knowledge,’ wrote Lenin, is the reflection of nature by man. But this is not a simple, not an immediate, not a complete reflection, but the process of a series of abstractions, the formation and development of concepts, laws, etc., and these concepts, laws, etc. (thought, science = “the logical Idea”) embrace conditionally, approximately, the universal law-governed character of eternally moving and developing nature.

‘Here there are *actually*, objectively, **three** members: 1) nature; 2) human cognition = the human **brain** (as the highest product of this same nature), and 3) the form of reflection of nature in human cognition, and this form consists precisely of concepts, laws, categories etc. Man cannot comprehend = reflect = mirror nature as a *whole*, in its completeness, its “immediate totality”, he can only *eternally* come closer to this, creating abstractions, concepts, laws, a scientific picture of the world, etc. etc.’ (Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 38, p.182).

80 years on

LENIN'S WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

THE first edition of Lenin's book *What is to be Done? Burning Questions of our Movement* was published in Stuttgart towards the middle of March 1902. It was in this very important work that Lenin outlined and developed the theoretical and practical base for the Bolshevik Party. Whilst the form of the contents are drawn from Russian conditions prevailing at the time the book was written, the content itself is universally pertinent to the urgent political tasks which we face in Britain today.

Needless to say, revisionists of all kinds go to great lengths in separating the form from the content by dismissing *What is to be Done* as something related to Russian conditions only at the beginning of this century. Yet, a glance at its contents will soon reveal that this is by no means the case. History,' wrote Lenin, has now confronted us with an immediate task which is the most **revolutionary** of all the **immediate** tasks confronting the proletariat of **any** (my emphasis) country.' (Lenin's Collected Works, Volume 5, Page 373.)

'... Indeed, no one, we think, has until now doubted that the strength of the present-day movement lies in the awakening of the masses (principally, the industrial proletariat) and that its weakness lies in the lack of consciousness and initiative among the revolutionary leaders.' (ibid).

In the conclusion of the first section of Chapter II, he remarks: For this reason the question of the relations between consciousness and spontaneity is of such enormous general interest, and for this reason the question must be dealt with in great detail.' (Volume 5, page 374). ... In particular,' he stressed, it will be the duty of the leaders to gain an ever clearer insight into all theoretical questions, **to free themselves more and more from the influence of traditional phrases** (my emphasis) inherited from the old world outlook, and constantly to keep in mind that socialism, since it has become a science, demands that it be pursued as a science, i.e. **that it be studied.**' (Volume 5 Page 372) (My emphasis).

What is spontaneity?

The historical origins of spontaneity' go back to the slave-owning society out of which the division between mental and manual labour originally emerged. By 'spontaneity' is meant a process of social development whose objective laws are not organised by men and therefore beyond their control. This process eventually led to the manual worker becoming the object of exploitation for the ruling classes. Whilst at first the division played a progressive role, later, deep-going class antagonisms were revealed when the privilege of being engaged in mental labour fell to the ruling class and its agents, whilst the manual worker became more and more nailed to his job.

Thus the division which was at first progressive, now became transformed more and more into the class struggle in capitalist society, which as time went by became predominantly reactionary. Under such conditions, the brutal effects of capitalist crisis were dumped more and more on the working class who were obliged to starve when there was a slump and die on the battlefields of imperialist war when imperialist

contradictions required a bloody redivision of the world of capitalism with its accumulated property and plunder.

In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels explain how the original purveyors of mental labour now dominated the working class with their bourgeois ideas. □The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant-material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. In so far, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in their whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.' (*The German Ideology*, Page 38. Lawrence and Wishart 1939.)

'But why,' wrote Lenin, the reader will ask, does the spontaneous movement, the movement along the line of least resistance, lead to the domination of bourgeois ideology?' And he answers: For the simple reason that bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than socialist ideology, that it is more fully developed, and that it has at its disposal **immeasurably** more means of dissemination. And the younger the socialist movement in any given country, the more vigorously it must struggle against all attempts to entrench non-socialist ideology, and the more resolutely the workers must be warned against the bad counsellors who shout against "overrating the conscious element", etc.' (Volume 5. Page 386)

In the early part of the century it was the Economists' which were an opportunist trend within Russian social democracy who endeavoured to subordinate the working class to spontaneity through the economic struggle. Through these limitations they injected the poison of bourgeois ideology and its influence into the working class by keeping the issues in dispute confined to wages and working conditions. -

What the Economists were doing in Russia in Lenin's day, the Labour and trade union leaders are doing here today, under conditions where spontaneity has long ago become a real danger to the future of the working class. It is not only the Labourites, but the Stalinists also, with their peaceful road', and their renegade ex-Trotskyist allies who preach subservience to the Labour Party as well as a trade union level of politics. All these forces pursue downright reactionary roles because whether or not they are right wingers or pseudo lefts', there is one thing that they are all in agreement on and that is to keep the working class tied down to spontaneity and bourgeois ideology. Between themselves, their differences amount to nothing more than empty words. The Tribune group, or the Stalinists – they all subscribe to reformist solutions and passive adaptation to spontaneity.

Meanwhile the trade union bureaucracies with the powerful resources at their disposal, remain the back-bone of spontaneity in Britain. Not only are they for class peace, they are for waving the flag for any imperialist war Thatcher cares to embark upon. Their affiliation to the Labour Party is nothing more than what Lenin called

lending the economic struggle a political character'. In this way they constantly strengthen the backward ties with spontaneity.

There is also a dangerous manifestation of spontaneity within the revolutionary party itself. The sharp division between mental and manual labour is expressed in a tendency which separates theory from practice. Such a position lends itself easily to scepticism and positivism, thus reinforcing powerful anti-theory moods.

The labour and trade union bureaucracy continuously counter-poses the many forms of spontaneity such as anti-theory, backwardness, lending the economic struggle a political character', inside the Labour Party against the struggle for a higher theoretical analysis of the revolutionary struggles ahead. This is strengthened by the capitalist state through its television media. A good deal of viewing time is devoted towards films of trade unionists on strike, under conditions where they are always the gallant losers'.

'The economic struggle', wrote Lenin, is the collective struggle of the workers against their employers for better terms **in the sale of their labour power**. This struggle is necessarily a trade union struggle, because working conditions differ greatly in different trades and consequently the struggle to **improve** them can only be conducted on the basis of trade organisations, (in the western countries through trade unions, in Russia, through temporary trade associations and through leaflets etc.)' (Volume 5, Page 404.)

'Lending the "economic struggle itself a political character" means, therefore striving to secure satisfaction of these trade demands, the improvement of working conditions in each separate trade by means of "legislative and administrative measures" (as Martynov puts it on the ensuing page of his article p.43). This is precisely what all workers' trade unions do and always have done. Read the works of the soundly scientific and ("soundly" opportunist) Mr and Mrs Webb and you will see that the British trade unions long ago recognised and have long ago been carrying out, the task of "lending the economic struggle itself a political character".' (Volume 5, Page 404.)

Is not this happening in Britain today? Is not this what all the Labour governments have been doing since 1924? This is at the heart of the in-fighting' which is now blowing apart the Labour Party. The world economic crisis of capitalism and its manifestations in Britain has decreed that the days for lending the economic struggle a political character' are over. This plays right into the hands of the Tory enemy when capitalism here and elsewhere is heading for the most brutal dictatorships since Hitler, Franco and Mussolini.

Those like the wretched Militant' group of Ted Grant, whose policy is to transform the Labour Party into a revolutionary party, also in their own way lend the economic struggle a political character'. This amounts to nothing more than the crudest subservience to bourgeois reformist ideology and spontaneity'. As a consequence, by disarming the working class, they too open the door to dictatorship, despite their legal Marxist differences with the right wing.

It is the petty-bourgeois trade union bureaucracy which rules the Labour Party through a high-powered group of equally petty-bourgeois careerist intellectuals, who, deep down, hate the working class and secretly worship at the feet of Mrs Thatcher and her anti-union laws. They do everything in their power, therefore, to deprive the working class of its revolutionary role, and together with the trade union bureaucrats

keep it chained in the background, whilst the upper petty bourgeois of Thatcher's Cabinet trample and spit all over it.

The trade union bureaucrats run the Labour Party precisely for this purpose today. This is why they, together with their puppet politicians, stand to keep the Labour Party safe for bourgeois ideology and 'spontaneity' which taken together leads to subservience to Toryism.

What is consciousness?

'Spontaneity' and bourgeois ideology' have their roots in a period which has long since become historically outmoded. Today, when we face the death agony of capitalism' as Trotsky put it, the revolutionary cadres of the party must clearly understand, otherwise we will be tail-ending the spontaneity of the trade union bureaucrats and the bourgeois ideology disguised as leftist' politics of the Labourite and revisionist politicians. To understand the real dangers ahead, let us turn to Lenin's view on class political consciousness'.

'Class political consciousness,' he wrote, can be brought to the workers **only from without** that is only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers.' (Volume 5, p422) Both spontaneity' and consciousness' are dialectical categories and polar opposites. Just as mental labour separated itself from manual labour, spontaneity must be regarded separately from consciousness. Lenin in *What is to be Done?* posed this issue in its sharpest immediacy.

First he referred to the universal absorption of the Russian youth in the middle 1890s in the theories of Marxism'. In the same period he wrote the strikes that followed the famous St Petersburg industrial war of 1896, assumed a similar general character'. (Volume 5, p374). This strike or industrial war' (1896) as Lenin referred to it, was 'spread over the whole of Russia' and thus clearly showed the depth of the newly awakening popular movement'. Whilst regarding such a strike as spontaneous', he went on, they could not be compared with the seventies' and sixties' which 'were accompanied by the "spontaneous" destruction of machinery etc'. But there is spontaneity and spontaneity,' he commented. . . . Compared with these "revolts", the strikes of the nineties might even be described as "conscious" to such an extent do they mark the progress which the working-class movement made in that period. This shows,' he continued, that the "spontaneous element", in essence represents nothing more nor less than consciousness in an embryonic form.'

Those who fail to understand what Lenin was writing about, sometimes draw the erroneous conclusion that when Lenin referred to spontaneity and spontaneity' he was suggesting that consciousness' automatically **unfolded** out of spontaneity' when the strike movement became more militant and instinctively revolutionary. Such revisionists are also great believers in the struggle of economic demands' and do their utmost to confuse the revolutionary vanguard by reducing the struggle for socialism from the science of the Marxist world outlook to subservience to the increasing militancy of strike movements.

Lenin insisted that such increasing militancy simply revealed the awakening antagonisms between workers and employers'. (Volume 5, p375) But the workers were not and could not be conscious of the irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system,' ... In this sense, the strikes of

the nineties, despite the enormous progress they represented as compared with the “revolts”, remained a purely spontaneous movement.’ (Volume 5, p375)

He then concludes: We have said that **there could not have been** social-democratic consciousness among the workers. **It would have to be brought to them from without.**’ (My emphasis). The history of all countries shows that the working class exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e. the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.’

In a footnote denoted by the asterisk, Lenin remarks: Trade unionism does not exclude “politics” altogether, as some imagine.’ (Volume 5, p375)

It is easy to see why the Tory ruling class today are doing everything possible to strengthen spontaneous realism’ in the ranks of the broad masses. With the Labour Party and Stalinist Parties from their inception steeped in bourgeois ideology, and dominated by the so-called working class politics’ of the trade unions, the consciousness of the working class in particular has **never risen above that of □spontaneity**’. This is at the heart of their domination by the two-party system’. It also explains why the votes of the WRP in elections are always very small in comparison to those candidates from the Labour and Tory parties.

In addition the class hostility towards the Tories is exploited by the Labourites in order to return Labour voters after the election to the safety and reactionary tranquillity of spontaneity and bourgeois ideology.

In order to combat the opportunism emanating from this reactionary swamp, our Party has to constantly wage political war against all forms of opportunism and trace their historical source. Without a continuous campaign developing revolutionary theory and policies, the working class can never consciously transcend the mental prison of □spontaneity’ which is advocated by the organisations of the trade union and Labour bureaucracy.

In practice, wrote Trotsky, a reformist Party considers unshakeable the foundations of that which it intends to reform. It thus inevitably submits to the ideas and morals of the ruling class. Having risen on the backs of the proletariat the social democrats become merely a bourgeois party of the second order.’ (*History of the Russian Revolution* by Leon Trotsky, p1016).

This applies very powerfully to the Labour Party and the trade unions at the present time. Since spontaneity as embryonic consciousness’ expresses the being of a living person it must be understood in unity with consciousness. Only in this dialectical relation can the relative significance of the sharp conflict between them be analysed and understood.

It is reality of a higher stage emerging out of reality of a lower stage. The development of consciousness, however, cannot be accomplished except through the dialectical process of cognition wherein the impulse towards revolutionary practice which will change the world is initially derived. In the course of this a break from spontaneity becomes imperative.

Since the process of Cognition is derived from the method of Marxism as a world scientific outlook, the development of consciousness can only be undertaken when that break is made from spontaneity. This is what Lenin meant when he wrote: Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers **only from without.**’ (Volume

5, p422). For the spontaneous movement of the working class cannot by itself develop consciousness since it has a bourgeois ideological content.

This does not mean, as our sterile propagandists insist, that theoretical and historical generalities drummed up from the past and carted into the Labour Party under the guise of ‘centrism’ is adequate. Such a position can only lead to the worst kind of opportunism and liquidation into spontaneity and bourgeois ideology. This is proved to the hilt by the experience of those ex-Trotskyist groups who have simply transformed Trotskyism into a sterile brand of legal Marxism’ (Trotskyist legal Marxism). It is against such deserters that Trotsky emphasised the decisive role of the dialectical materialist method in his last writings before he was murdered by Stalin.

Consciousness therefore, must be scientifically developed out of the external world which is its source. Unless this interpenetrates our existing theory of knowledge’ or self-consciousness’ thus allowing synthetic analysis to commence, we are in the camp of bourgeois idealism. Modern socialist consciousness,’ affirmed Lenin, can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge.’ (Volume 5, p383). Here is the core of the relative nature of the conflict between spontaneity and consciousness or between bourgeois idealism and the process of Cognition.

Society and consciousness

In his preparatory work on *What is to be Done?* Lenin was guided by the analysis which Marx made 42 years earlier when he wrote: In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.’ (*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, by Karl Marx, pp20-21, 1977 edition. Progress publishers.)

By starting his analysis from ‘society as a whole’ Marx took care to emphasise that: The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals’ social conditions of existence – but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The pre-history of human society accordingly closes with this social formation.’ (Pages 21 and 22, *ibid*)

What is to be Done? reflects the urgency which this paragraph had generated for Lenin. It explains why it was so necessary for him to counter-pose in the sharpest possible way the conflict between consciousness derived from the Historical Materialist analysis of the whole’ of society as against spontaneity’ which incorporated bourgeois ideology’. The discovery and elaboration of the Historical Materialist method by Marx and Engels was thoroughly understood by Lenin when he wrote:

‘A realisation of the inconsistency, incompleteness and one-sidedness of the old materialism convinced Marx of the necessity of “bringing” the science of society, into

harmony with the materialist foundations and of reconstructing it thereupon. Since materialism in general explains consciousness as the outcome of being and not conversely, then materialism as applied to the social life of mankind has to explain “social consciousness” as the outcome of social being.’ (*Marx, Engels, Marxism*, p17, 1977 edition)

By Historical Materialism, we mean the abstraction of the dialectical laws from the history of men’ in their actual life process, irrespective of whether they are capitalist or worker, trade unionist or non-trade unionist. Only in this way can the moments of objective truth in the conflict between spontaneity and consciousness emerge in their unity in real life. This is the source of Lenin’s references to spontaneity and spontaneity’ of what in physics is the area of invariance between the opposites’ when they are being transformed one into another.

The working class are only **part of society** as a whole and it is only possible to provide it with an all-sided revolutionary education when the objective developments within all classes in society are consciously brought in from without, regardless of the level of working-class politics within the trade unions. We must not lower revolutionary politics to the level of trade union politics.

Again and again Lenin returned to this main theme in *What is to Be Done?*: For the secretary of any, say English, trade union always helps the workers to carry on the economic struggle, he helps them to expose factory abuses, explains the injustice of the laws and of measures that hamper the freedom to strike and to picket (i.e. to warn all and sundry that a strike is proceeding at a certain factory), explains the partiality of arbitration court judges who belong to the bourgeois classes, etc., etc. In a word, every trade union secretary conducts and helps to conduct “the economic struggle against the employers and the government”. It cannot be too strongly maintained that this is still **not** Social Democracy, that the Social Democrat’s ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but the **tribune of the people ...**. (*What is to be Done?*, p423)

Lenin’s conception of the Tribune of the People’ one year later became the Bolshevik Party. The Workers Revolutionary Party advocates and implements these same policies in Britain today. Eighty years on, it returns to the same political powers of analysis as the day *What is to be Done?* was first published.

Studies in dialectical materialism

PART ONE

THE 42nd Anniversary of Leon Trotsky's assassination by an agent of Stalin is an occasion to remind ourselves again of the historical importance of his last great struggle in defence of dialectical materialism.

Before he died Trotsky insisted that the need to re-educate the Socialist Workers Party (USA) in dialectical materialism was central to the issues in dispute in relation to the class nature of the Soviet bureaucracy. The objection of the revisionists of those days to the introduction of dialectics as an issue in dispute was dismissed with the remark:

'Dialectical Logic expresses the laws of motion in contemporary scientific thought. The struggle against materialist dialectics on the contrary expresses a distant past, conservatism of the petty bourgeoisie, the self-conceit of university routinists and ... a spark of hope for an after-life.' (*In Defence of Marxism*, p67, New Park Publications edition.)

Fifteen years earlier (1924), Trotsky was involved in a life-and-death struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy. Stalin had raised the demagogic demand of the need to 'Bolshevise the party' at a time when he was going all-out to consolidate bureaucracy and prepare the physical destruction of Trotsky's Left Opposition.

The demand for 'Bolshevisation' was nothing but a cynical cover behind which Stalin was plotting not only to physically eliminate his opponents, but to terminate the democratic rights won by the Soviet working class and impose his own personal dictatorship over the Soviet masses. Trotsky, in a carefully-worded statement, commented as follows:

'Much has been spoken and written lately on the necessity for "Bolshevising" the Comintern. This is a task that cannot be disputed or delayed: it is made particularly urgent after the cruel lessons of Bulgaria and Germany a year ago. Bolshevism is not a doctrine (i.e. not merely a doctrine) but a system of revolutionary training for the proletarian upheaval.

'What is the Bolshevisation of the Communist Parties? It is giving them such a training and effecting such a selection of the leading staff as would prevent them from "drifting" when the hour for their October strikes. That is the whole of Hegel and the wisdom of books, and the meaning of all philosophy' (*Lessons of October*, p64, New Park Publications edition)

Now, with only months to go before his assassination, he was insisting once again on the necessity for a serious attitude towards the training of revolutionary cadres in the spirit of Hegel, Marx, Engels and Lenin.

'Dialectical thinking,' he wrote, 'is related to vulgar thinking in the same way that a motion picture is related to a still photograph. The motion picture does not outlaw the still photograph but combines a series of them according to the laws of motion ...

'Hegel wrote before Darwin and before Marx. Thanks to the powerful impulse given to thought by the French Revolution, Hegel anticipated the general movement of

science. But because it has only been an **anticipation**, although by a genius, it received from Hegel an idealistic character. Hegel operated with ideological shadows as the ultimate reality. Marx demonstrated that the movement of these ideological shadows reflected nothing but the movement of material bodies.’ (*In Defence of Marxism*, p66, New Park Publications edition.)

When it came to the dialectical materialist method and reading Hegel materialistically’, Trotsky was a staunch Leninist. He walked in the footsteps not only of Lenin but of Marx and Engels as well. The International Committee of the Fourth International, to which the Workers Revolutionary Party is affiliated, consciously trains and educates its members and leaders in this tradition.

We are pleased, therefore, to present to readers of the *News Line* an outline of some of the material covered in the courses on Dialectical Materialism at our College of Marxist Education during the months of June and July 1982.

Nature – The source of dialectics

THE source of dialectics is in dialectical nature, of which human beings are a dialectical part. ‘... for every materialist,’ wrote Lenin, ‘sensation is indeed the direct connection between consciousness and the external world; it is the transformation of the energy of external excitation into the fact of consciousness.’ (Lenin’s *Collected Works*, Volume 14, p51)

The ‘energy of external excitation’ is provided by the external world of nature which is primary with consciousness, thought, sensation as secondary ... (Volume 14, p46.)

‘Natural science leaves no room for doubt,’ he stressed, ‘that its assertion that the earth existed prior to man is a truth. This is entirely compatible with the materialist theory of knowledge; the existence of the thing reflected independent of the reflector ...’ (Volume 14, p123)

There can be no dialectical training unless these basic materialist principles are thoroughly understood. As long as we are paralysed by the dangerous effects of □bourgeois ideology’ then there can be **no** successful socialist revolution. So long as the **ideology** which maintains the ruling class in power predominates over the consciousness of parties and groups calling themselves Marxist, so-called revolutionary leaderships will remain floundering in fatal confusion.

Whilst this does not of course mean that every worker member of the Party will become a conscious dialectician, we do insist that the revolutionary Trotskyist leaderships in all countries must be trained in the dialectical materialist method.

When we speak of the predominance of the world of Nature **over** consciousness we refer of course to Social Being. Regardless of the individualistic approach of the idealists, it is not they who really decide what they think and do but the capitalist production relations which objectively predominate over them. Whether they like it or not, they are all **images** of the effects of these production relations. It is the class nature of these production relations that determines the consciousness of all individuals as well as their lifestyle.

Individuals cannot be understood outside the conditions of Social Being. The behaviour of men is determined by their materialist and thinking life, which in turn is

reflected in their ‘thoughts and feelings’. (See Lenin’s *Collected Works*, Volume 1, p405)

Lenin explained the materiality of this process a little further on in the same article when he wrote:

‘The theory of the class struggle, however, represents a tremendous acquisition for social science for the very reason that it lays down the methods by which the individual can be reduced to the social with the utmost precision and definiteness. Firstly, this theory worked out the concept of the *social-economic formation*.

‘Taking as its starting-point a fact that is fundamental to all human society, namely the mode of procuring the means of subsistence, it connected up with this the relations between people formed under the influence of the given modes of procuring the means of subsistence, and showed that this system of relations (“relations of production”, to use Marx’s terminology) is the basis of society, which clothes itself in political and legal forms and in definite trends of social thought.’ (Volume 1, p410)

These remarks by Lenin are very important for dialectical training. The development of consciousness in the past by Hegel and the founders of our movement must be understood as an infinite process. Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky outlined and fought for revolutionary policies and interpretations of history. They believed that by overthrowing the capitalist system through a social revolution and fundamentally changing the social circumstances under which men lived, this would in turn change men themselves.

Men, they insisted, were not the source of the negative features of human nature. The capitalist **mode of production** which maintained a veritable handful of rich idlers at the expense of the working class through the exploitation of profit, was, in fact, the real source of human nature.

The founders of our movement have bequeathed to us a scientifically derived revolutionary **theory of knowledge** which is presently the core of our dialectical training. Not only is the development of consciousness an infinite process, but the cognition of the external world is an infinite process as well. The process of cognition today enables us to stand on their shoulders as it were, and complete the historical tasks they set out to accomplish.

Their efforts and ours have been greatly strengthened by the considerable achievements in the natural sciences over the past six decades. These would not have been understood if it were not for the materialist interpretation of the external world which they fought for. In this way they have contributed to the invaluable legacy of Hegelian concepts and categories (stood on their feet) without which the richness of these advances would not have been understood. For this reason Marxism is a world scientific outlook since it incorporates all the gains of the sciences as well as being itself a science of Historical Materialism.

In the ‘process of cognition’ we have a theory of knowledge which enables us through its constant dialectical development, to speedily guide our objective dialectical practice. While the idealists are still juggling around with the self-created images of their own pessimisms, we can have the richness of the revolutionary reality of the external world at our disposal thereby providing us with an enormous speed of movement through the initiation within the working class of advanced and more and more revolutionary practices.

The dialectics of the external world

TO STUDENTS of dialectics, the external material world is initially and mistakenly taken for granted. In their efforts to become conscious of its existence their idealist training invariably takes over. They start by creating images of what they think it is, which are then wrongly imposed upon its ever-changing reality.

In periods like the present when great changes are constantly emerging in the world crisis of imperialism, the idealist is constantly living in an atmosphere of frustration; pessimism and fear, within the self-created images of what, in fact, is their own reality.

They become dominated more and more by bourgeois ideology.

This emanates from the needs of a ruling class in the throes of a mortal economic and political crisis. They are drawn further and further away from the objectively potential reality of the historical revolutionary role of the working class. Without a dialectical materialist outlook the ruling class have the present-day idealist in a trap of his **own** creation.

The principle of **OBJECTIVITY** in the approach to the external world constitutes the basic difference between materialism and abstract idealism. We therefore begin with Lenin's invaluable analysis 'On the Question of Dialectics'. (Volume 38, p359)

'The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts,' according to Lenin, ... 'is the essence (one of the "essentials", one of the principal, if not the principal, characteristics or features) of dialectics.' (Volume 38, p359)

We use the philosophical concept **Being** to denote the materiality of the objective world as a single **whole** existing **independently** of consciousness. Being is **nature** including human beings. Whilst we recognise Being as primary and consciousness as secondary, the process of Cognition interprets consciousness as not merely a passive reflection of Being, but as an active force which influences Being in a dialectical way. Being is matter which exists independently of consciousness and is the source of all sensation. Under these conditions Being is primary, consciousness is secondary.

Being as matter in motion, when negated immediately, has an **empirical existence**. When it has entered into a **unity** with its opposite **Not Being** it constitutes three dialectical moments, **Being**, **Becoming** and **Not Being**. It is something sublated only in so far as it has entered into a unity, into its opposite, Not Being, within the relation of Becoming; denoting movement and change.

Thus we have perceived the division of unity into its mutually exclusive opposites which are Being and Not Being, whilst remaining united in the form of their **Becoming** in the infinite movement and changes of nature itself. The **Positive** infinite concept of Being' through **Becoming**' has now entered into a self- relation with its opposite **Not Being**.

The infinite **source** of sensation (Being) is in the external world existing independently of consciousness, which has now been registered as **sensation** in consciousness in the form of its 'Other', the abstraction Not Being. In this self-relation the **outer forms** are the Positive (Being) and its abstract also a positive (Other) Not Being – the latter is now implicitly **CAUSE** which is **finite**. At one point **cause** will **become Effect** and at another **effect becomes cause** when the first negation in general is completed.

The 'thing', whatever it is, is now considered **mediated**, as the Other of Being. Being and Not Being are forms which contain as their content the first infinite negation as negation in general.

The external world of reality is the quantitative outer source (world for itself) of the first qualitative **inner movement of negation, in general** (world in itself). It has for its content the infinite internal qualitative source of the negation itself. The infinite **positive** form (Being) which has been negated simultaneously into its own finite abstraction is now dissolved into its own infinite Negative which completes the first **Negation in general**.

The duration of the first Negation is here limited to the measurement in time of that micro portion of the external world which is initially negated, whilst it registers within the negation for its content the absolute conflict between infinite and finite.

Because of the time limit of the negation they become reciprocally transformed into one another, tending more and more to exceed the limitation of the negation in general which contains them. Here is the inner source of the emergence of absolute essence initially negated from its outer source in the external world. This absolute nature of essence itself is negative Semblance.

Hegel, with the approval of Lenin, explains that that part of the objective world (Being) embodied in Not Being preserves itself in the negative of its determinate Being. It is essentially 'one with it' and 'not one with it'. It stands in a relation to its otherness and is not simply its otherness. Otherness as infinite is at once contained within it preserving itself as a finite part or being of another.

Whilst working on *Capital* Marx, for the purposes of a closer study of economic phenomena, analytically isolated important features of the Hegelian concept, **negation in general**.

Being represented basic raw materials at their quantitative source in the external world. These constituted **Value** within infinite negation or Negation in general. The Finite Not Being then became qualitative **USE VALUE** which is a form containing value as its infinite content.

Cloth is an example of Use Value. Since many finite product forms, such as suits etc, can be made from cloth for people to wear, the **infinite** value is constantly being transformed into finite Use Value. These finite use values have **now** acquired a new **value form** which is **exchange value**. As suits of clothes, for example, they have acquired an **Exchange Value**.

Abstract human labour is the infinite element of all commodities. It is the value content of Negation in general. The basic contradiction within a commodity for exchange is that it both 'is and is not' a use value. For the owner it is not – for the consumer it is. During negation in general **value** has become **use value**.

The negative of the form **use value** which incorporates **value** tends to go beyond negation in general and drives towards the negation of the negation, of entry into the Universal world of Exchange where it will circulate as a commodity. Thus what was infinite (Value) has become finite (Use Value) and what was finite (Use Value), is pushing for Negation as a commodity into Exchange. There is here a double positing – Value into Use Value – Use Value into Exchange Value.

The importance of antithesis

THE negative side of semblance now contains 'Essence as reflection in itself' (absolute essence). (Volume 38, p129) This is the beginning of the important moment of **antithesis** which is the ground in which the Laws of Identity, Difference and Contradiction are manifested. Absolute essence (Negative Semblance) confronts our theory of knowledge which becomes Positive Semblance as they face each other in antithesis.

We have ended the sensuous stage of the Cognitive process. Being has been mediated by **Not Being** and at the same time they are joined together through Becoming which is now Existence, or mediated Being. 'Essence is what it is by virtue of its own infinite movement of Being.' (Volume 38, p130.)

As concepts, Being, Not Being, Becoming, have become more and more **distinctive**. 'In human concepts,' wrote Lenin, 'nature is reflected in a distinctive way (this NB: in a distinctive and dialectical way).' (Volume 38, p285.) 'Not only is the transition from matter to consciousness dialectical, but also that from sensation to thought, etc.' (Volume 38, p283)

Concepts emerge during subjective cognition, in the dialectical transition from sensuous representation to thought. Sensuousness cannot apprehend movement as a whole. 'Thought taken from sensuous representation ... reflects reality.' (Volume 38, p228)

The properties of sensuous representation build up into thought forms. They are an initial **part** of the same process of apprehending the external world, but they should be understood in the transition from sensuousness to thought. Living Perception and Cognition begins with thought at the stage of **antithesis**, because 'in a certain sense, sensuous representation is, of course, lower.' (Volume 38, p228)

'The difference between sense-perception (sensation) and Cognition,' said Lenin in a quotation from Hegel, 'is: that which causes the sensation is **external**. The cause of this is that perceptive activity is directed on the particular, while knowledge has as its object the universal.' (Volume 38, p286 - my emphasis)

Semblance then consists of Positive and Negative parts with antithesis as **common ground** to both. The Negative as **Absolute essence** faces Positive essence which contains the method of dialectical logic coinciding with a theory of knowledge. Presently, this method will be used extensively for purposes of analysis.

'**The dialectical**,' (my emphasis) wrote Lenin in a quotation from Hegel, 'is comprehending the antithesis in its unity.' (Volume 38, p98)

Antithesis is resolved through the interpenetration of **absolute essence** as the Negative side of Semblance into essence as the Positive side of Semblance. In the moments of antithesis as their self-relation, the Positive Semblance, which previously was negatively inactive now assumes an active role as it confronts Negative Semblance. Whilst as Lenin explains: 'There is a difference between the subjective and the objective ... it too has its limits.' (Volume 38, p98)

The Subjective side of Semblance is the ground which in its antithesis towards its Positive side contains the limits of contradiction which arose from negation between them. This can only be resolved through the interpenetration of the negative Semblance into what is now the Positive or (Universal). This takes place through the

negation of the negation in general (Negation of the Negation – Quality into Quantity).

Cognition and practice

THE use of concepts in particular, applies to sensuous knowledge. We go from distinction to contradiction, and from concepts to categories. ‘Categories are,’ as Lenin wrote, ‘stages of distinguishing i.e. of cognising the world, focal points in the web, which assist in cognising and mastering it.’ (Volume 38, p93)

Categories cognise and assess the operation of the objective laws governing nature and society, they are ‘an expression of laws both of nature and of man,’ (Volume 38, p91) and of the objective world which help him. They are moments of man’s knowledge in the formulation of general laws of nature.

Categories enable us to understand the more general features of the objective world as they are reflected in our consciousness. They assist us to extend and develop our theory of knowledge, thus creating conditions for the elaboration of further **scientific concepts** about our reflections of external reality. Dialectics of sensations, perceptions, notions and concepts, enable man to go from ignorance to knowledge, from ‘essence of the first order to essence of the second order’.

Lenin referred to the sensuous development of the concept when he wrote: ‘First of all impressions *flash* by, then *Something* emerges – afterwards the concepts of quality (the determination of the thing or the phenomenon) and quantity are developed. After that study and reflection direct thought to cognition of identity – of difference – of Ground – of the Essence versus the Phenomenon – of Causality etc.’

‘... Quality and sensation are one and the same, says Feuerbach. The very first and most familiar to us is sensation, and in it there is inevitably also quality.’ (Volume 38, p319)

The data of ‘sensuous knowledge’ which is equivalent to the **concept** is cognised in the **form of words**, at first stimulated by theoretical thinking in relation to **Concepts**.

The more we become trained in the use of theoretical thinking derived from previous dialectical practices, the **earlier** our ordinary consciousness will become the object of conceptual analysis for dialectical study. Such an analysis in Subjective Cognition will provide guidance in the examination of empirical data at the stages of sensuousness and negation in general, when forms of words will still lack a dialectical thought content.

Through the use of categories we shall of course become ever more trained both in the development and use of new concepts. As Lenin explained: ‘The use of knowledge and practice is the essence of dialectical cognition... Thought proceeding from concrete to the abstract, provided it is correct, gets closer to it ...’

And further: ‘Man by his practice proves the objective correctness of his ideas, concepts, knowledge, science.’

‘The unity of the theoretical idea (of knowledge) and of practice – this NB – and this unity precisely in the theory of knowledge, for the resulting sum is the “absolute, idea” and the idea = “the objectively true”.’ (Volume 38, p219)

These are an historically concrete approach to the process of Cognition and practice which reveal the connection between both. We must evaluate the practices of human beings in the process of becoming rather than allowing them to remain something that has already become.

Against idealism and scepticism

THE source of Idealism and Scepticism invariably starts at **Semblance**. As Lenin explained in a quotation from Hegel: ‘Semblance then is the Phenomena of Scepticism ... Modern idealism did **not dare** to regard cognition as a knowledge of the Thing-in-Itself; with the former, Semblance was supposed to have no basis at all in any Being; with the latter, the thing in itself was supposed incapable of entering into cognition. But at the same time scepticism admitted manifold determinations of its Semblance; or rather its Semblance had for content all the manifold riches of the world. In the same manner the appearance of idealism comprehends the whole range of these manifold determinatenesses.’ (Volume 38, pp130-131)

The Idealists and Sceptics **subjectively** impose or manipulate their ideas of what **they think** Semblance means, which is what Lenin referred to when he commented:

‘You include in Semblance all the wealth of the world and you deny the objectivity of Semblance.’ (Volume 38, p131)

Or as Hegel put it when he explained the difference between his ‘materialism’ and the idealism of Leibnitz, Kant and Fichte: ‘They did not reach beyond being,’ that is the Positive or **one side** of the image. Lenin comments: ‘They did not go deeper.’ The idealists stopped at the Positive Form whereas the sceptics saw this form as content ... that which is immediately given ... of its Semblance to be given to it; for it, it is immediate, whatever Content it is to have.’ (Volume 38, pp131-132)

‘The monad of Leibnitz develops its presentations out of itself; but it is no creative and connecting force – the presentations arise in it like bubbles; they are indifferent and immediate relative to one another, and therefore to the monad itself.’ (Volume 38, p132)

‘Monad’ is a Greek word denoting Being as a structural unit. It was one of the main concepts of Leibnitz’s philosophy. For him it was the **sole source of Being** endowed with a soul which according to Leibnitz was a spirit. He claimed that the whole world is reflected in the Monad and that its individuality contains infinity. ‘Here’ wrote Lenin, ‘is dialectics of a kind, and very profound despite idealism and clericalism.’ (Volume 38, p383)

‘Kant’s phenomenon,’ wrote Hegel, ‘is a given content of perception; it presupposes affections, determinations of the subject which are immediate to one another **and to the subject.**’ (Volume 38, p132 - my emphasis)

‘The infinite limitation or check of Fichte’s idealism,’ said Hegel, ‘refuses, perhaps, to be based on any Thing-in-Itself, so that it becomes purely a determinateness in the Ego. But this determinateness is *immediate* and a *limit* to the Ego.’ (Volume 38, p132)

In a word, if you create your own ‘images’ of what is going on in the external world, then **they remain your own**, being a **limited** self creation of your ego, or one’s image of oneself.

The Idealists always cling to the rigid Identity that is ‘simple Essence’, ignoring that Essence reveals Semblance through Negation. For them the law of identity has its **opposite** in the law of Variety and NOT in the law of **Difference**, which is one-sided determinedness containing only formal truth which is abstract and incomplete. All things are different. One cannot IDENTIFY something unless we can show its **Difference** with something else.

Or as Trotsky explained it simply and clearly:

‘Every worker knows that it is impossible to make two completely equal objects. In the elaboration of bearing-brass into cone bearings, a certain deviation is allowed for the cones which should not, however, go beyond certain limits (this is called tolerance). By observing the norms of tolerance, the cones are considered as being equal. (“A” is equal to “A”.) When the tolerance is exceeded the quantity goes over into quality; in other words, the cone bearings become inferior or completely worthless.

‘Our scientific thinking is only a part of our general practice including techniques. For concepts there also exists “tolerance” which is established not by formal logic issuing from the axiom “A” is equal to “A”, but by the dialectical logic issuing from the axiom that everything is always changing. “Common sense”, is characterised by the fact that it systematically exceeds dialectical “tolerance”.

‘Vulgar thought operates with such concepts as capitalism, morals, freedom, workers’ state, etc. as fixed abstractions, presuming that capitalism is equal to capitalism, morals are equal to morals etc. Dialectical thinking analyses all things and phenomena in their continuous change, while determining in the material conditions of those changes that critical limit beyond which “A” ceases to be “A”, a workers’ state ceases to be a workers’ state.’ (*In Defence of Marxism*, New Park Publications edition, p65)

Synthesis – law and contradiction

‘THE coincidence of concepts with “synthesis”,’ wrote Lenin, □ with the sum, summing up of empiricism, sensations, the senses, is indubitable for the philosophers of all trends. Whence this coincidence? From God (I, the idea, thought etc., etc.) or from (out of) nature? Engels was right in his formulation of the question.’ (Volume 38, p28S.)

And Engels: ‘In world schematism pure mathematics arose out of pure thought – in the philosophy of nature it is something completely empirical, taken from the external world and derived from it.’ (Anti-Duhring, pS4.)

The law of the identity of **Not Being** is confirmed through its difference between the time of its development and the Negative into which it has dissolved. This difference is **already** in sensation posited contradiction, within the Negative side of Semblance. Within the antithesis absolute contradiction arises as the contradiction inherent in Negative Semblance starts to interpenetrate and activate the latent contradiction already posited in the essence of **Positive Semblance**.

Synthesis is a **leap** which according to Lenin distinguishes the dialectical transition from the undialectical transition. ‘The interruption of gradualness. The Unity (Identity) of Being and Not Being.’ (Volume 38, p284). Synthesis at first appears in Sensation where Not Being becomes the mediator of its opposite Being. It next

appears, when again, via external reflection through Negation of the Negation, interpenetration of Negative into Positive Semblance takes place, making it possible for different structures of thought to emerge. Absolute essence, containing Being as Mediated by Not Being, interpenetrates Positive Essence, leading to Essence in Existence.

The law of Identity is now based upon contradiction whose ground is **Essence in Existence**. This is a **unity** of Positive into Negative and Negative into Positive Semblance or Finite into Infinite as Essence in Existence and Infinite into Finite. The truth of contradiction is contained in the relation of Positive and Negative to each other. Each contains the other in its **own** concept – Negative Semblance maintains a Positive direction in its movement.

The Negation of the Negation through the interpenetration of Negative Semblance into Positive Semblance now determines itself into Variety and Opposition. These include the posited contradiction of Negative Semblance which is more profound than the Contradiction which was latent in Positive Semblance before its activation in its Antithesis with Negative Semblance. It is only insofar as it contains Contradiction that anything which moves has impulse and activity. Since infinity is contradiction as it appears in the sphere of Being, there must be a determination of absolute essence after each synthesis.

‘But the fact,’ wrote Lenin, ‘that Positive itself is negativity causes it to pass outside itself and to change.’ (Volume 38, p140) And he adds: ‘If an existent something cannot in its **positive** determination also encroach on its negative, cannot hold fast the one in the other and contain Contradiction within itself, then it is not living unity or Ground, but perishes in Contradiction.’ (Volume 38, p141)

Idealist thinking is always speculative because it excludes **Contradiction**. Lenin provides an example of this in a quotation from Hegel: ‘Thus although Imagination everywhere has Contradiction for content, it never becomes aware of it; it remains an external reflection, which passes from Likeness to Unlikeness.’ (Volume 38, p142)

Hegel comments: ‘The simplicity of these determinations conceals the contradiction from imagination; but this contradiction immediately stands revealed in the determinations of relation.’ (Volume 38, p141.) And he continues: ‘The most trivial examples – above and below, right and left, father and son, and so on without end – **all contain contradiction in one term.**’ (Volume 38, pp141-142 - my emphasis)

That which is **below** at one point can be above at another, and vice versa. That which is a **turning** on the left-hand side of the road when travelling in one direction can be on the right-hand side of the road when returning from the opposite direction. A father today is at the same time himself a son of a father and so on.

But, says Hegel, correctly: ‘Father is the **Other** of son, and son of father, and each exists only as this Other of the other; and also the one determination exists only in relation to the other; their Being is one subsistence.’ (Volume 38, p142)

What is important to understand here is that antithesis is not some separate stage preceding Semblance. It must be understood as moments of vital connection between the transition through interpenetration of Negative into Positive Semblance. The antithesis of Yes-No-No-Yes continues during this transition **within the interpenetration** leading to Appearance.

‘Ordinary imagination,’ writes Lenin, ‘grasps difference and contradiction, but not the transition from one to the other; this however is the most important.’ (Volume 38, p143)

By ‘ordinary imagination’ Lenin is referring to the one-sidedness of ‘external reflection’ which he insists that by its ‘simplicity conceals’ the transition of Being into the other of being, when they both are the **same** and **not the same**. That must be demonstrated if **absolute essence** is to be revealed in a way in which Being is **both itself** and its other, and Other is **both itself** and Being. As Hegel explains: ‘**Infinity** ... is Contradiction as it appears in the sphere of Being.’ (Volume 38, p140 - my emphasis)

The idealist keeps two determinations like Other and Being external to each other. They are denied **transition into one another**. For the concept of things and their relations the Idealist has only determinations of imagination for material and content’. He allows their **concept** to show through the contradiction, but he does ‘**not express** the concept of things and their relations.’ (Volume 38, p142)

Essence must appear

LENIN turns again to Hegel, who writes: ‘Thinking Reason, on the other hand, sharpens (so to speak) the blunt difference of Variety, the mere manifold of imagination, into essential difference, that is, **Opposition**. The manifold entities acquire activity and vitality in relation to one another only when driven on to the sharp point of Contradiction; thence they draw negativity, which is the inherent pulsation of self-movement and vitality ...’ (Volume 38, p142 – my emphasis)

The idealist ignores ‘determinant content’ which allows the thing-in-itself to come into existence, which is the law of ground. He allows only the relation of external reflection to judge the differences between Negative and Positive Semblance when they must interpenetrate into one another through antithesis, synthesis and absolute contradiction.

Only when this is done can ‘things-in-themselves’ emerge as parts each of which is a posited entity whose source is in the external world of Being. The form of appearance of the parts is Essence in Existence and as their properties build up to that of the material world on the outside their ground changes from existence grounded on Appearance to Appearance grounded on existence.

Mediations now take place at all stages of cognition, and it is here that the method of dialectical logic is used for analysis. ‘Logic is the science of cognition,’ writes Lenin. It is the theory of knowledge. Knowledge is the reflection of nature by man. But this is not a simple, not an immediate, not a complete reflection, but the process of a series of abstractions, the formation and development of concepts, laws etc., and these concepts, laws, etc., (thought, science = “the logical idea”) embrace conditionally, approximately the universal law-governed character of eternally moving and developing nature ...’ (Volume 38, p182)

Dialectical Materialism utilises the principle of the coincidence of dialectics, logic and the theory of knowledge. This coincidence is of great importance in the present situation of the impending collapse of some of the world’s leading banking groups. Lenin in his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* referred to the development of such a crisis.

‘Every individual producer in the world economic system realises that he is introducing this or that change into the technique of production; every owner realises that he exchanges certain products for others; but these producers and these owners do not realise that in doing so they are thereby changing Social Being.

‘The sum-total of these changes in all their ramifications in the capitalist world economy could not even be grasped by 70 Marxes. The most important thing is that the laws of these changes have been discovered, that the objective logic of these changes and of their historical development has in its chief and basic features been disclosed.’ (Volume 14, p325)

This process is objective in the sense that social being is *independent of the social consciousness* of people. ‘The highest task’, wrote Lenin, 75 years ago, ‘... is to comprehend this objective logic.’ (Volume 14, p325)

The principle of coincidence enables us to define the objective content of a **given** category by revealing its relations as a stage of knowledge in relation to other categories such as necessity, probability, possibility.

The Category of Appearance is a moving form in the first instance within thought itself. As essence builds up from its source in the external world it expands its form in the course of analysis, and this form is the ‘showing of Essence in itself’ of ground and grounded. Matter is the passive, form is the *active*. ‘Matter must be formed and form must materialise itself...’ ‘Now this,’ writes Hegel, ‘which appears as the activity of Form, is equally the proper movement of Matter itself ... oth – the activity of Form and the movement of Matter – are the same.’ (Volume 38, p145) ‘Form is essential. Essence is formed.’ (Volume 38, p144)

This activity of Form is the proper unity of matter. Content equals Form and they must coincide. (Volume 38, p 145) Understanding a **part** presupposes understanding a **whole**. A knowledge of the **whole** presupposes a knowledge of its constituent **parts**. This is what is meant by the **law of Appearance**.

‘Law’, Lenin said in a quotation from Hegel, ‘is the reflection of Appearance into identity with itself.’ Appearance is about to emerge in Actuality in which Law is identical with it.

PART TWO

THE category of ‘Appearance’ exists initially in the theory of knowledge as negative self-mediation. It is the movement of anti-thesis apprehended in its unity before Negative semblance inter- penetrates Positive semblance, thus activating the theory of knowledge and Appearance as a category. **Law** as a category is reflection of Appearance into **identity** with itself.

From the law of the **unity** of contradictions within the process of interpenetration, Essence enters into Existence. What now appears is ‘impressions passing by’, a variety of parts of what will eventually be the whole Appearance of **Something**. Thus the Laws of the Identity of Unity and Variety of opposites manifest within the laws of Appearance – all performing a **positive** function. From the **concepts** Identity, Difference and Contradiction which characterised Subjective Cognition we have

reached the stage of the emergence of the **categories** of dialectical logic through which we will analyse the relation of these parts to the whole.

The Categories of Parts and Whole Within Appearance

AS The properties of the parts build up, their forms will become more easy to recognise and analyse in relation to the whole. Parts and whole **exist** solely in relation to one another and since they are changing all the time, they manifest change through the **law of opposition to one another**. At first, parts seen on their own are **no longer** parts but **wholes**. Each of them **exists-for-itself**. As categories, whole and parts are related essentially to their '**other**'. The whole must hold the parts as self subsistent, whilst understanding a part presupposes understanding a whole.

If 'something' has real existence as a 'whole' then we must be able to define its constituent parts. The whole must be seen as an **inner force** which will strive to manifest itself in external reality as **essence** which must appear. Real wholes must have elements bound together by the interaction of parts and whole. Since the parts and whole are constantly changing, the whole as such can never be a sum total of its parts. It is instead the sum total and unity of opposites in constant change, which are simultaneously not only single wholes but many wholes. Thus wholes change into parts and parts into wholes.

Any category claiming to be the totality of something must be exceeded in its constant movement and change, since there is always an inherently negative movement **outwards** beyond the **limits** of negation in general. It is this movement which exceeds such limits that constitutes the category of **Necessity** which arises out of Essence in Existence, with its internal properties building up towards Appearance.

The whole must be seen as parts standing in a **certain** relation to each other. Through **analysis** we identify the properties of an object which transform it from a part which is a whole into a part of a larger whole. Cognition of the whole and its parts proceeds simultaneously. As we single out parts for analysis we do so as elements of a **single whole**.

As the result of the synthesis between the whole which is Appearing and its parts, the whole **Appears** consisting of parts in conflict between themselves and the whole and vice versa. (This is the same synthesis which arose out of the interpenetration of Negative into positive Semblance. The method of analysis which follows is therefore called synthetic analysis.) As Lenin explains: 'Every notion occurs in a certain relation, in a certain connection with all the others' (Lenin's *Collected Works*, Volume 38, p197) and he adds: 'the relativity of opposition between notions ... the identity of opposites between notions.' (ibid)

Form and Content Within Appearance

THE category of Appearance describes a moving form **within** thought itself as in the case of the growth of a baby from different substances in its mother's womb before birth. It is an inner form in which a variety of Essences must eventually appear.

The development of **Form** and **Content** is the development of two sides of the same phenomenon. The division of the whole into these two branches inevitably gives rise to contradictions and conflict leading to the discarding of form through the changes necessitated by the **growth** of its **content**.

The **unity** of form and content within Essence in Existence is **relative** and subject to change, because of the struggle between different functions in its development. For example, a change of **content** becomes the basis of development within Form as the mode of existence of a thing **before** it Appears.

The content possesses its **own motion** which form depends on; although it (form) has its own relative motion also. It can either hold back development or speed it up; in such a way that it can sharpen the contradictions between Form and Content. At one point it can stimulate development and at another it may conservatively retard it. This process cannot, however, be simply relegated to the contradiction between the active and passive sides of **Form** and **Content**, since through the interaction of them as opposites, the **old form** is either **transformed** or **abolished**.

The Sum Total and Unity of Opposites in Analysis

THE Category of Appearance incorporates the sum total of the elements and objects which reveal through External Reflection the dialectic of internal matter in motion. It describes the phenomena and processes which arise from the first of Lenin's basic elements of dialectics: 'The determination of the concept out of itself (the thing itself must be considered in its relations and in its development)'. (Volume 38, p221.)

Being as the source of sensation in the external world has its Finite Other in Not Being' (sensation - Existence). Holding fast the opposites (Being, Other) through **Becoming** is achieved by **mediation**. In the first, determinate Not Being is **immediate** and coming to be. In the second, Being is immediate and ceasing to be. Each sublates itself insofar as it has a unity with its opposite. (See Hegel's *Science of Logic*, p106)

Becoming is understood only in the separateness of Being and Not-Being. Their vanishing into one another is the vanishing of Becoming. The self movement of the external world is here seen to be the basic mode of existence of matter as it is reflected in thought. The use of the word sublate means to preserve, to maintain, to put an end to. Being is **preserved** in its other (Not Being). The other is maintained in Being. Because they are separate moments of the movement of matter, they are also terminated.

External reflection **by itself** leads to one-sided determinateness which apprehends as the source of sensation only the **infinite positive** side of the image. Finite' (its other) is the same as Existence, something preserves itself as the Finite Negative of its determinate Being in a way in which it is 'at one with it', since it is a moving Finite negative of life itself. Its otherness is both **contained** and **separate**. Infinite negates the Finite until it again has the Finite as a different moment confronting it. The Finite posits other as infinite and the infinite posits its other as finite. Thus we have the transition of the infinite into the finite and the finite into the infinite (antithesis) within the outer form of Negation in general.

Negation in general is completed with both Infinite and Finite in unity, conflict and transformation into each other, whilst being negated into **absolute essence**. As the negative nature of semblance, this negative of absolute essence drives forward beyond the limitations of its negation in general, to penetrate through antithesis into Positive Semblance.

There now follows a state in which unity through inter- penetration is accomplished in absolute contradiction.

Appearance in Actuality

THE ground on which the dialectical relationship between parts and whole is established is **Essence in Existence**. The law of **Existence** reveals the properties of Essence to be constantly changing in a relative and richer way towards each other as parts in relation to some presupposed whole. This reaches a point in which the emerging form of Appearance is grounded on the changing qualities of Existence which gives rise to the law of Necessity. The method of synthetic analysis will begin to concentrate on the dialectical relation between content and form thus reproducing the law of EXISTENCE on a higher level.

Existence now bases itself on Appearance until Form and Content are identically and abstractly revealed in the category of the Unity and Identity of Opposites. The two sides of Appearance are contained in this abstraction. Inner Form and Content being equal, have now become self identical and at the same time reflected into self in Appearance as well as reflected into the outer world of Actuality. **Possibility** is a category which reveals itself as **two opposing** self subsisting existent moments. It has the Unity and Identity of Opposites posited as a positive reflectedness into self of external Actuality as well as a moment which points to the outer forms of the Actuality of the external world.

In these two moments Possibility is grounded in the external world. It has arisen from the **Necessity** of the inner form of Appearance as Essence which is formed and must appear. Thus the subsistent other moment of the external world arises as Possibility through the unity of the inner and outer moments contained in the category of the Unity and Identity of Opposites. Within the category of Possibility we have the unity of the inner and outer moments of Appearance and Actuality as opposites existing independently of each other.

‘Actuality is the unity of Essence and Existence ...’ (Volume 38, p156)

Lenin reveals the perspective of Actuality, in Essence and EXISTENCE. (See box on the side Volume 38, p156) ‘Usually: from one extreme to the other totality = (in the shape of) dispersed completeness ...’

‘The one-sidedness of one philosophic principle is generally faced by its opposite one-sidedness, and, as everywhere, totality at least is found as a dispersed completeness’”

‘Actuality is higher than Being, and higher than Existence.’ (ibid.)

‘(1) Being is immediate

“*Being is not yet actual.*” It passes into other.

[It is still **only** Appearance, GH]

‘(2) Existence (it passes into Appearance)

– arises out of Ground, out of conditions, but it still lacks the unity of "Reflection and immediacy.”

‘(3) **Actuality**

unity of Existence and Being- in-Self.

‘... “Actuality also stands higher than Existence” ...’ (Volume 38, p157)

Actuality stands in ‘dispersed completeness’. It is the unity of **Existence** and **Being-in-self**, on the verge of the Notion.

Lenin says that this relation is ‘**full of content**. But this necessity is at the same time relative.’ (ibid)

‘The unfolding of the sum-total of the moments of actuality NB = the essence of dialectical cognition.’ (Volume 38, p158)

‘... in the same Encyclopaedia, the eloquent words on the vanity of mere delight at the wealth and flux of the phenomena of nature and on the necessity... “of advancing to a closer insight into the inner harmony and *uniformity of nature* ...” ’.

Lenin concludes: ‘(Closeness to materialism.)’ (ibid)

PART THREE

CAUSALITY starts in the external world and is manifested in thought through Finite Cause as the other of Being. Finite **Cause** becomes Effect and **Effect** becomes **Cause** in the transformation of the Finite into the Infinite and vice versa.

‘But the movement of the Determinate **Relation** of Causality,’ wrote Hegel, ‘has now resulted in this, that the **cause** is not merely extinguished in the effect, and with it the effect too (as happens in Formal Causality) – but the cause in its extinction, in the effect, becomes again; that effect vanishes into cause, but equally becomes again in it. Each of these determinations cancels itself in its positing and posits itself in its cancellation.’ (Lenin’s *Collected Works*, Volume 38, p.161)

Hegel continues: ‘At this point Reciprocity presents itself as a reciprocal causality of presupposed substances conditioning each other; each is, in relation to the other, at once active and passive substance.’ (ibid), ‘Causality presents itself as ... Becoming.’ (ibid), in movement and change.

When **Subjective Cognition** interpenetrates through antithesis the □theory of knowledge’ it conditions itself as **substance** similar in example to positive and negative electricity.

Substance and Measure

SUBSTANCE as a dialectical category has proved to be a necessary condition, without assuming which it was impossible in principle to understand, the mode of the interaction between the thinking body and the world within which it operated as a thinking body. Dialectical materialism rejects the idea of any immutable, homogenous **substance** and holds that which is in constant motion and development is the **substance**.

At the same time **Measure** is a category which seeks to establish an organic unity between quality and quantity. Every qualitatively distinct object has its own quantitative object. It has its own quantitative attributes, which are both immobile and immutable. This very mutation, however, is of necessity bound by certain limits (beyond which quantitative changes lead to qualitative changes).

These limits are the limits of **measure** itself. The connections and unity of quantity and quality are **simultaneously** conditioned by the nature of a given object.

Lenin, in a quotation from Hegel, says: ‘Necessity and Causality have, then, vanished in it; they contain both the immediate identity (as connection and relation) and the

absolute substantiality of distincts, and therefore their absolute contingency – the original unity of substantial variety, hence absolute contradiction.’ (Volume 38, p.161)

Lenin describes this as the ‘unity of substance in the distinct’ (ibid), Being and Essence are the moments of Becoming of the Notion – ‘from Intuition to Cognition of objective reality’.

Lenin’s reference to ‘unity of substance in the distinct’ refers to the ‘nodal lines’ in which either quality or quantity, depending upon conditions, may emerge in existence. Subjective cognition is a decisive impulse, through antithesis and interpenetration it is negated into the theory of knowledge and into the mental world embodying the individual in which Causality and Substance build up to Reciprocal action through Necessity to the leap to the abstract Notion.

The Abstract Notion is obliged to unavoidably become a ‘**positive or theoretical Notion**’.

This means that it returns to **Semblance** on a **higher level**.

The self-movement of matter is responsible solely for the movement of thought through Semblance, Appearance and Actuality, once the stage of the abstract Notion is reached, **practice** itself generates the self-movement of matter. The break with subjective thinking is reached and the objective side of practice is implemented.

The **abstract** notion completes the dialectical process of thought within the self-relation between individual and Universal and vice versa. The **theoretical** Notion is the external world itself which supplies the **positive** side to the Notion. The practical impulse has emerged from subjective self-impulse, which is **thought to objective practice**.

The Notion

‘THE Notion, writes Hegel, ‘is determined in and for itself [abstract], and is the middle member’ (in the logical figure of the syllogism) ‘only because it equally has the significance of the objective’. (Volume 38, p220) The form and content of the Notion is the same, that is why it draws its determinate element directly from its object.

‘In reality,’ says Lenin, quoting from Hegel, ‘objectivity is only a stage of development from Being and Essence – whereupon this subjectivity dialectically breaks through its Barrier’ and ‘opens out into objectivity by means of the syllogism’. (Volume 38, p.183)

The subjective is a moment in the development of the objective. Having emerged, the **subject** exercises an active influence on the **object**, thus **revealing itself within it**. The dialectical whole is thus revealed in **objective thought**, in a way in which the one-sidedness of both **subject** and **object** is **abolished**. (Volume 38, p208)

‘Theoretical cognition ought to give the object in its necessity, in its all-sided relations, in its contradictory movement *an-und-fursich* [in and for itself]. But the human notion ‘definitively’ catches this objective truth of cognition, seizes and masters it, only when the notion becomes ‘being-for-itself’ in the sense of **practice** [my emphasis]. That is, the practice of man and of mankind is the test, the criterion of the objectivity of cognition. (Volume 38, p.211)

Lenin insisted that ‘... the conformity of concepts with objects is *not* subjective’. (Volume 38, p.194) ‘... Man’s consciousness not only reflects the objective world, but creates it.’ (Volume 38, p.212) The world in itself is relatively different from the world as a **thing for us**. ‘Practice is higher than (theoretical) knowledge, for it has not only the dignity of universality, but also of immediate actuality.’ (Volume 38, p.213)

Man Expands Nature Through Practice

THE HISTORY of human beings is organised in society as the history of the growth of the creative element, man’s initiative, both employers and working class. The higher the consciousness of people, the higher their cognition of the objective laws of nature and history. Through the union of cognition and **practice**, social man changes and expands his external conditions of existence in accordance with his needs.

When we speak of the activity of dialectics, dialectical logic and the theory of knowledge in thought, we are posing the question of the dialectical transition. ‘What,’ asks Lenin, ‘distinguishes the dialectical transition from the undialectical transition?’ And he answers: ‘**The leap** [my emphasis]. The contradiction. The interruption of gradualness. The unity (identity) of Being and not-Being.’ (Volume 38, p.284)

The ‘leap’ is to **practice** under conditions in which ‘consciousness creates it’. (Volume 38, p.212) This is extremely important and reveals that the law of the unity and struggle of opposites of **theory as a guide to practice**, reveals the source of all internal self-movement; and self-development of objects in the external world.

‘Dialectical transition’ builds up to a point where the leap takes place and this is where **practice** really begins. A **transition** can be gradual, slow or fast, but a **leap** is a **jump – a complete change** in the subject as a result of the **activity** of the **object** of cognition.

For Lenin, the unity of theory and practice was the essence of dialectical cognition, because it was man’s interaction and dependence upon the external world in order to live.

Or, as he himself explains it: ‘... the practical activity of man had to lead his consciousness to the repetition of the various logical figures thousands of millions of times in order that these figures could obtain the significance of axioms.’ (Volume 38, p.190)

Subjective **dialectical thought** becomes **submerged** in the **objective** situation thousands of millions of times so that the ‘consciousness of man can attain the significance of axioms’.

As Lenin explains on page 191, Volume 38: ‘Man by his *practice* proves the objective correctness of his ideas, concepts, knowledge, science.’

Practice is not just another category of dialectics, a **criterion of truth** as the theory of man’s practical activities. It is the dialectics of the object as well as the subject of action – action as the goal and action as the result as well as the theory. Thinking is **subjective practice**, and **physical practice** is **objective** and both interact on each other.

Practice, according to Lenin, is **Subjective end**; it is also **external means** (‘man’s tools’) as well as the coincidence of **subject** and **object**. Hence as Lenin explains it: ‘... the activity of man, who has constructed an objective picture of the world for himself, changes external actuality’. (Volume 38, p.218)

The concept of **subjectivity** ‘... is the **impulse** to destroy this separation (of the idea from the object).’ (Volume 38, p.194) What this means is that the **subjective** must be understood as the content of man’s cognition of the world, although it **appears** to be **independent** of the world.

‘In actual fact,’ writes Lenin, (Volume 38, p.189) ‘men’s ends are engendered by the objective world and presuppose it – they find it as something given, present. But it *seems* to man as if his ends are taken from outside the world, and are independent of the world (“freedom”).’

‘The laws,’ explains Lenin, ‘of the external world, of nature, which are divided into mechanical and chemical (this is very important) are the bases of man’s purposive activity.’ (Volume 38, p.187)

And again: ‘In his practical activity, man is confronted with the objective world, is dependent on it, and determines his activity by it.’ (Volume 38, p.187-188)

‘From this aspect,’ comments Lenin, ‘from the aspect of the practical (purposive) activity of man, the mechanical (and chemical) causality of the world (of nature) appears as something though *external*, as though something secondary, as though something hidden.’ (Volume 38, p.188).

The dialectical training of subjective, purposive, thinking leads to the dialectically practical goals men have set themselves and to the enrichment of the dialectical laws of countless practices. A dialectically organised human being is one who clearly recognises the dialectical laws of thinking in their natural practical surroundings determined by **practice**.

It is presently possible with subjective and objective dialectical training to set aside sufficient components, as it were, from human knowledge, that is, at the point of □living perception’. These are moments revealed by the unity of the negative and positive nature of semblance at the stage reached by abstract thought, such as Marx in his work on *Capital*.

The interaction of opposites is a finite manifestation which is undergoing constant change in mutual and reciprocal action and reaction between the most elementary particles, between particles and fields of particles.

Without the capacity for the interaction of particles at all levels, matter as such could not exist. **Interaction** emerges in the relation in which **cause** and **effect** constantly change places. On page 318, Volume 38, Lenin, in assessing the role of scientific knowledge, writes: ‘The concept (cognition) reveals the essence (the law of causality, identity, difference, etc) in Being (in immediate phenomena) – such is actually the *general course* of all human cognition (of all science) in general.’

What has to be understood is that the dialectical method of cognition is both **mediated** and **substantiated** by dialectical practice. ‘If Marx,’ wrote Lenin on page 319, Volume 38, ‘did not leave behind him a “*Logic*” (with a capital letter), he did leave the *logic* of *Capital*, and this ought to be utilised to the full in this question. In *Capital*, Marx applied to a single science logic, dialectics and the theory of knowledge of materialism (three words are not needed: it is one and the same thing) which has taken everything valuable in Hegel and developed it further.’

On the same page Lenin notes: ‘Abstract "Sein" [Being] only as a moment in everything flows.’

Commodity – money – Capital

↓
production of absolute surplus value ⊥ production of relative surplus value

‘The history of capitalism and the analysis of the *concepts* summing it up.’ (Volume 38, p.320)

‘The beginning – the most simple, ordinary, mass, immediate “Being”: the single commodity (“Sein” [Being] in political economy). The analysis of it as a social relation. A *double* analysis, deductive and inductive – logical and historical (forms of value).

‘Testing by facts or by practice respectively, is to be found here in each step of the analysis.

‘Cf. concerning the question of Essence versus Appearance

– price and value

– demand and supply versus (crystallised labour)

– wages and the price of labour-power.’ (ibid)

Lenin’s emphasis here upon testing by ‘facts’ and practices throughout analysis does not mean that **perception** only is a realisation of man’s aims – it is also a means of perceiving ever new tasks. In his article *On the Question of Dialectics* (Volume 38, p.361), he writes:

‘Every individual is connected by thousands of transitions with other **kinds** of individuals (things, phenomena, processes), etc. *Here already* we have the elements, the germs, the concepts of *necessity*, of objective connection in nature, etc. Here already we have the **contingent** [my emphasis] and the necessary, the phenomenon and the essence; for when we say: John is a man, Fido is a dog, *this* is a leaf of a tree, etc., we *disregard* a number of attributes as *contingent*; we separate the **essence** from the **appearance** [my emphasis], and counter-pose the one to the other.’

The **Appearance** is **Price** – The **Essence** is **Value**.

The **Appearance** is Wages – The **Essence** is the price of **Labour Power**.

Dialectical interaction **between theory and practice** enables the mind to be trained simultaneously in thinking about what the individual is doing as part of the ‘theory of knowledge’, as well as the world which he sets out to change through his practice. The ability to **think** arose initially out of practice, which means that it follows the same dialectical pattern as the struggle to change the world in relation to the requirements of human beings.

The best known work of Marx in this respect is *Capital*, where he selected his dialectical tools as laws of analysis which enabled these laws to be abstracted out of living events.

‘In his *Capital*,’ writes Lenin, ‘Marx first analyses the simplest, most ordinary and fundamental, most common and everyday *relation* of bourgeois (commodity) society, a relation encountered billions of times, viz. the exchange of commodities. In this very simple phenomenon (in this “cell” of bourgeois society) analysis reveals *all* the contradictions (or the germs of *all* the contradictions) of modern society. The subsequent exposition shows us the development (*both growth and movement*) of

these contradictions and of this society in the summation of its individual parts, from its beginning to its end.’ (Volume 38, p.360-361)

Empiricism and Theoretical Thinking

THE SOURCE of sensations in the external world constitutes countless moments of empirical origin and has important implications. It is a natural beginning which means that this is the only way we can, in fact, subjectively appraise the world.

The purpose of theory is to mentally reproduce **reality**, but initially it is impossible to achieve this at an empirical level. The unfolding processes of theoretical knowledge are at this point far from taking shape as a specific investigation. Scientific knowledge at this early stage arises from an interaction between sensuality and thought, wherein the source of **sensation** is in the external world.

The process of cognition presupposes on a theoretical level of sensuality and science, in particular, the acquisition of **fantasy**. Creative imagination in many ways can predetermine success, provided it is not used solely as a substitute for imagined successes. It has to be dialectically processed from practice to thought.

As Lenin points out: ‘Feuerbach very ingeniously and clearly explains how ridiculous it is to postulate a “transcendence” from the world of phenomena to the world in itself, a sort of impassable gulf created by the priests and taken over by the professors of philosophy.’ Here is one of his explanations taken from Feuerbach.

‘ “Of course, the products of fantasy are also products of nature, for the force of fantasy, like all other human forces, is in the last analysis both in its basis and in its origin a force of nature”.’ (Volume 14, p118)

In a quotation from *Anti-Duhring* referred to by Lenin, Engels states: “The unity of the world does not consist in its being, although its being is a precondition of its unity, as it must certainly first be, before it can be **one**. Being, indeed, is always an open question beyond the point where our sphere of observation ends. The real unity of the world consists in its materiality and this is proved not by a few juggled phrases, but by a long and wearisome development of philosophy and natural science.” (Volume 14, p117)

Beyond the sphere where our observation ends, such being, as Lenin stressed, **is indeed an open question**. Our empirical investigation **orientates** cognition towards the identification of relationships between the conceptual apparatus of science and the reality which is beyond and which is seen through analysis as a whole as being beyond the **conceptual field**, only to be revealed in living contemplation. Science, it must not be forgotten, provides a knowledge of objective reality and not some closed conceptual structure.

Whenever the **empirical** and the **theoretical concept** interact, a very definite function takes place in the **interaction**. This is in accordance with the findings of observation and experiment with corresponding results through improvement in the cognitive process itself.

By way of developing scientific knowledge, an empirical examination may be oriented by conceptual theoretical tasks. Concepts such as **elaboration** and **perfection** constitute an act of **singling out** and **penetrating objective** reality, in an ever-**fuller** and ever deeper reflection of its **substance**.

What must be understood about the abstractly positive nature of **theoretical thinking** is that it manifests its **own** content through the form which encourages mentally reflective contact between the external world and the individual.

The **content** is contained in the **form** of the initial undefined image of sensation itself. Imaginative wholeness which comprises the content of theoretical thought is not a product of the notion, thinking and self-developing outside of contemplation and imagination, but is a processing of contemplation and images into Notions. (*Grundrisse* by Karl Marx, p22)

This is understood as two aspects of a single process. There is internal **perfection** and **development** of its means and the **external** which is the application of these means towards the assimilation of material which is **beyond the cognitive system itself**. Examples of the dialectical and empirical process of cognition are obliged to take into account the existence of historically different stages of science which brought together these two fundamentally different types of cognitive activity (Empirical – Dialectical materialist) through the development of their possibilities in relation to each other.

In the early stages of dialectical materialism as a scientific study, we quickly arrive on the scene of a study of concepts. In this relationship, such a study provides guidance for **empirical examination** in the proper sense of the word. That is why **induction** as a method in science, through which a general conclusion is drawn from a set of premises, must **not** be used at the **empirical stage of science**.

To further emphasise the highly-speculative nature of cognition, in the process of studying the **object of cognition**, it is highly important to bear in mind the process of cognition as a whole. As Lenin described, ‘the old, formal logic is exactly like a child’s game, making pictures out of jig-saw pieces.’ And he comments: ‘It has fallen into disrepute’. (Volume 38, p96)

Lenin goes on to quote Hegel: ‘For method is the consciousness of the form taken by the inner spontaneous movement of its content’. (ibid) This is an extremely important observation, as we shall see.

The negative nature of semblance takes us up to the end of the first negation which was initiated in the external world at the source of sensation. From sensations to the negative nature of semblance. The **negation** of this **negation** comprehends ‘the anti-thesis in its unity’ (Volume 38, p98) in the course of the **interpenetration** of negative semblance into positive semblance. Until that dialectical interconnection is made, negative semblance cannot manifest itself in positive semblance and a **unity** of the two in contradiction cannot be established.

A synthesis manifesting antithesis is **decisive** here, otherwise **no connection** can be made, and the negation of negation **cannot** be completed. There can only be a **word form** which would be meaningless without essence as content. Without the negative and positive nature of essence in antithesis and interpenetration being established, a **word form** would be an absurdity.

But **theoretical thinking** as a guide to empirical examination is an essential aspect of **speculative thinking** in the **process of cognition itself**. The dialectical materialist **safeguard** is the process of antithesis through the **interpenetration** of negative into positive semblance. The unity of antithesis in interpenetration of one into the other must exist in a state of **absolute contradiction** otherwise it is not **dialectical essence**.

In turn, this means, that we must allow for the use of **word forms** with **only implicit** reference to the first Negation. If we are to avail ourselves of the deepest aspects of material gathered from empirical observation and examination under conditions in which the knowledge dialectically and materialistically gathered from empiricism yields ever richer and wider sources of knowledge, we must be prepared, to 'grasp the nettle where it stings most'.

Some lessons from our Summer School on Dialectical Materialism

STUDIES in Dialectical Materialism is an effort to persuade students who attended the school to accept the dialectical method not simply as a source of knowledge, but as a method of **dialectical training** which will enable dialectically derived theory to guide our objective practice.

The dialectical materialist method, as Lenin explained, must contain ‘the *objectivity* of consideration (not examples, not divergences, but the Thing-in-itself)’ as a major element. (Lenin’s *Collected Works*, Volume 38, p221)

‘Sensations’ for Lenin are the ‘images or reflections of **things**’ (my emphasis). He explained the origin of the thing as follows: ‘For every materialist, sensation is indeed the direct connection between consciousness and the external world; it is the transformation of the energy of external excitation into the **fact** of consciousness’. (Volume 14, p51, my emphasis) ‘... Sensation, thought, consciousness are the supreme product of matter organised in a particular way.’ (Volume 14, p.55)

Matter derived from the external material world organised in particular ways provides different kinds of sensations resulting in different thoughts. . . . ‘*Independently* of us’, writes Lenin, ‘there exist other people, and not mere complexes of my sensations of high, short, yellow, hard, etc – this same *experience* produces in us the conviction that things, the world, the environment exist independently of us. Our sensation, our consciousness is only *an image* of the external world, and it is obvious that an image cannot exist without the thing imaged, and that the latter exists independently of that which images it.’ (Volume 14, p69)

Contradictory results

DURING the summer months, when our courses on dialectical materialism were in session, we sought to establish some guidelines for our work. Our intention took the form of an effort to enable students to rapidly distinguish the fundamental difference between the origins of the materialist and idealist methods. We emphasised the essence of Leninist materialism by stressing that if ever the student was in doubt, the origins of materialism were always from **without**, reflected in the form of sensation. Whereas the origins of **idealism** were from **within** and resulted in thoughts being **imposed** upon the **external world** and not derived from it.

Whilst at the school it seemed that students, at least in words, had no difficulty in understanding this. It was a different matter when they returned to their areas. Back home in the branches, the practical results appeared to be no different and, in some cases, had even deteriorated.

Our Political Committee did not consider, by any means, that the final experience had been made. Rather, it took this reality as a challenge which required a deeper study not so much of how to simplify the dialectical method, as to how to acquire a more theoretical and objective understanding of it.

A desire for dialectical change is not enough

FOR, in what Lenin described as ‘the determination of the concept out of itself (the thing *itself* must be considered in its relations and in its development)’ (Volume 38, p221), we have another powerful element of dialectics. No matter how much we may desire change, and believe that dialectical change must eventually manifest itself, all the material conditions for the change must be present before change can emerge.

The very students who are resisting change, by either failing to respond to encouragement or are, indeed, going into further retreat away from a desired change, **must** produce the knowledge of how change will eventually be made out of their **actual practices** in resisting change.

Those who correctly desire change, even when all the conditions are materially present for change, are obliged to study the reasons for those who cannot yet make the change before understanding why the change is being held up. This is done through the practices which both sides must endeavour to develop through collective study.

In other words, we must avoid like the plague the idealist tendency to turn, or imagine that opposites have turned into each other in our heads. No matter how difficult the internal problems of the Workers Revolutionary Party, they reflect corresponding difficulties whose source is in the external world and not in leaders’ and members’ heads.

It is at this point we can appreciate what Lenin is referring to when he stresses that we must study ‘the contradictory nature of the thing itself (the other of itself) the contradictory forces and tendencies in **each phenomenon.**’ (Volume 38, p221, my emphasis)

‘Dialectics,’ wrote Lenin, ‘is the teaching which shows how *Opposites* can be and how they happen to be (how they become) *identical*, – under what conditions they are identical, becoming transformed into one another, – why the human mind should grasp these opposites not as dead, rigid, but as living, conditional, mobile, becoming transformed into one another. In reading Hegel ...’. (Volume 38, p109)

It would be almost impossible to achieve such results outside the political development and training of revolutionary leadership. The day-by-day experiences in the collective work of the Central and Political Committees and at branch level of the Workers Revolutionary Party are invaluable in this respect.

Party proletarian discipline, if nothing else, imposes the necessity of working together regardless of the pressures when urgent problems requiring theoretical and practical clarification are involved. Regardless of the political sharpness of the issues involved, we know the ultimate solution will not be found in how right we think we are, as against the slowness of others to grasp the political issues, even though such an experience is decisive.

Without such collective political work we **cannot** become aware of how the opposites in **each phenomenon** become identical, thus signifying the possibility that they can become transformed into each other, and the Party’s practice put in dialectical order, in relation to its theory.

This will not allow the convinced idealist to go on indefinitely damaging the party – rather it means that through such collective theoretical and practical education, the Party as a whole will tend more and more to break from idealist methods.

A Kantian origin

KANT, wrote Lenin, believed the ‘thing-in-itself’ to be an empty abstraction, but Hegel demands abstractions which correspond to the essence: “the objective concept of things constitutes their very essence”, which correspond’, as Lenin wrote, ‘speaking materialistically – to the real deepening of our knowledge of the world.’ (Volume 38, p92)

‘Forms,’ Lenin quoting Hegel, ‘which are merely forms attached to the content, and **not** [my emphasis] the content itself.’ What Hegel wanted, according to Lenin, were ‘forms with content’. ‘Logic’, wrote Lenin, ‘is the science **not** [my emphasis] of external forms of thought, but of the laws of development “of all material, natural and spiritual things”.’ (Volume 38, p92)

‘On the other hand,’ wrote Lenin, “intelligent and conscious action” brings out “the content of that which motivates ... out of its immediate unity with the subject” and makes it “an object for it” (for the subject).’ (Volume 38, p93)

‘How is this to be understood?’ asks Lenin, and he replies: ‘Man is confronted with a web of natural phenomena. Instinctive man, the savage, does not distinguish himself from nature. Conscious man does distinguish, categories are stages of distinguishing, ie. of cognising the world, focal points in the web, which assist in cognising and mastering it.’ (ibid)

Lenin understood the ‘development of thinking in accordance with its necessity’. (Volume 38, p94) In the conclusion of the chapter; he explains what he means: ‘The categories have to be derived (and not taken arbitrarily or mechanically) (not by “exposition”, not by “assurances”, but with *proofs*).’ (ibid)

What is needed’, he wrote, is ‘negation as a moment of connection, as a moment of development, retaining the positive, i.e. without any vacillations, without any eclecticism.’ (Volume 38, p226)

A common error

THE MOST common error which is prevalent in our Party concerns the use of word forms which tend to be separated from the actual content of what is considered to be their real meaning. During the period of the inflationary boom, which followed World War II, the use of such word forms tended to be devoid of their real content so far as the world crisis of capitalism is concerned.

Fancy names such as ‘Job Centres’ are used to obscure the impact of permanent mass unemployment – the idea being created that if anyone needs work there is always a ‘Job Centre’ in our so-called bourgeois ‘democratic society’.

Insidious emphasis is placed on the individualist approach to serious economic and political problems which can only be explained from their real content, which is the global crisis of capitalism.

Comrades prefer to be able to explain the source of their **mistakes** as having some individual and particular origin so they concentrate on providing a self-created origin.

There is an element of idealist prestige here, which can be traced to a subjective-idealist approach. Those who follow this idealist method start with the **par**’ and not the **whole**, mistakenly believing that if they can show the movement of the self-selected **part**, then it follows that this is the movement of the **whole**.

They fail to understand that both parts' and wholes, through continuous conflict between one another, are in continuous change in their self-relations into one another.

The subjective idealist sees this dialectical process in a fixed and mechanical way, erroneously believing that he or she can isolate the error by not starting from the whole. They imagine that once they have explained that **mistake** in this way, they have done away with the source of that mistake. In reality, by separating individual parts from their real wholes, they are engaging in an arbitrary individualist approach which is the essence of subjective idealism.

A favourite 'get away' here is to preface such remarks with the words '**at this time**', which allows the confused listener to feel that 'at this time' the individual who is doing the explaining was wrong, implying that at **other times** they were **right**. In fact, such is the nature of their subjective-idealist approach that they were **wrong all the time** and not simply **at this time**.

In his chapter on the *Idea of Cognition* (Volume 38, p204) Lenin reproduces some important quotations from Hegel against Kant and Hume on this agnostic approach: 'In Kant,' he writes, 'the Ego is an empty form ("self extraction") without concrete analysis of the process of cognition.' He was guilty, wrote Lenin, of 'abstract one-sided determinations of "former – pre-Kantian – metaphysics" '.

The Idea of Cognition

KANT, according to Lenin, followed Hume's sceptical manner. He held fast to that which appears as Ego in self-consciousness, from which, however, everything empirical must be omitted, since the aim is to know its essence, or the Thing in Itself. 'Now, nothing remains but the phenomenon *I think* which accompanies every idea; and nobody has the slightest notion of this "I think".' (Volume 38, p205)

'Apparently,' Lenin writes in the next paragraph, which is contained in a box on the same page: 'Hegel perceives scepticism here in the fact that Hume and Kant do not see the appearing, Thing-in-itself in "phenomena", divorce phenomena from objective truth, doubt the objectivity of cognition, remove everything empirical from the thing-in-itself.'

'And Hegel continues:' writes Lenin, "'It must certainly be admitted that it is impossible to have the slightest notion of Ego or anything else (the Notion included), if *no Notion is formed* and a halt is made at the simple, fixed *general idea and name*" .' (ibid) 'Name' here denotes a general idea or an **empty word form**.

Lenin insisted: 'It is impossible to understand without the process of understanding (of cognition, concrete study etc.)' (ibid) and again, in another box at the end of the same page:

'In order to understand, it is necessary empirically to begin understanding, study, to rise from empiricism to the universal. In order to learn to swim, it is necessary to get into the water.' (ibid) What Kant did was to restrict □himself to phenomena', as Lenin shows in the following paragraph on the next page.

'According to Hegel,' wrote Lenin, 'the old metaphysics, in the endeavour to cognise *truth*, divided objects in accordance with the characteristic of truth into substances and phenomena. Kant's Critique *rejected* the investigation of truth ... "But to stand

fast at appearance and what proves to be mere sensuous representation” [concludes Hegel] in everyday consciousness is tantamount to a renunciation of the Notion and of philosophy”.’ (Volume 38, p206)

Several students at the summer school sincerely believed that all that was necessary was to agree with the words used in the dialectical method, overlooking that when they returned to the branches the ‘old word forms’ would manifest themselves and with them all their ‘**false contents**’, in a rigmarole of idealist practices.

They thus overlook what Hegel explains, to Lenin’s approval, that ‘it can be only the nature of the content which stirs in scientific cognition, while at the same time it is this very reflection of the content which itself initially posits and produces its determination’. (Volume 38, p87)

The overall educational work in the branches must take this experience into account by constantly keeping in front of students that it is the **content** which ‘**must stir**’ in the ‘**word form**’ in scientific cognition.

That means that the **content**, which is the manifestation of the world economic and political crisis of capitalism, has to be taken into account for content.