1

STANLEY RYERSON AND THE MATERIALIST
CONCEPTION OF HISTORY:

A STUDY IN THE STALINIST DISTORTION
OF MARXISM

by

C

Brian McDougall, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Institute of Canadian Studies

Carleton University

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September, 1981

"WHAT IS ULTIMATELY AT ISSUE IS OUR UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIALIST POLITICS, FOR THE WAY WE UNDERSTAND HISTORY CANNOT BE DISSOCIATED FROM THE WAY IN WHICH WE TRY TO MAKE IT." (Simon Clarke)

"IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT SOCIALISTS BEGIN TO RE-EXAMINE RADICALLY THE THINGS THEY HAVE SO FAR TAKEN FOR GRANTED, THE INHERITANCE OF THE PAST. FOR THAT INHERITANCE IS MAINLY FROM STALINISM, AND IT HAS FOR TOO LONG BEEN A SYSTEM OF FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS, INHIBITING REVOLUTIONARIES FROM UNDERSTANDING AND ANALYZING THEIR OWN SOCIETIES AND THE WORLD SYSTEM. BETWEEN THE MINDLESS MILITANCY OF SIMPLE ACTIVISTS AND THE PARLOUR SPECULATION OF MERE "THEORISTS", THERE HAS SEEMED TO BE A GULF THAT RENDERED MARXISM AS A CREATIVE METHOD IMPOSSIBLE. INSTEAD OF THE LIVING TRADITION, WE HAVE HAD RITUAL, DOGMA, TERMINOLOGICAL HAIR SPLITTING, ALL DESIGNED TO PRESERVE THE REPUTATION OF A FOREIGN RULING CLASS RATHER THAN PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ONLY CLASS THAT CAN LIBERATE THE WORLD. THE RATIONALIZATION OF PAST PRACTICE RATHER THAN THE ORIENTATION OF FUTURE ACTION ASSUMED PRIMARY IMPORTANCE - EXCUSES RATHER THAN AIMS." (Nigel Harris)

"STALINISM IS SOCIALIST THEORY AND PRACTICE WHICH HAS LOST THE INGREDIENT OF HUMANITY. THE STALINIST MODE OF THOUGHT IS ... THAT OF MECHANICAL IDEALISM.... STALINISM IS LENINISM TURNED INTO STONE. INSTEAD OF COMMENCING WITH FACTS, SOCIAL REALITY, STALINIST THEORY STARTS WITH THE IDEA, THE TEXT, THE AXIOM: FACTS, INSTITUTIONS, PEOPLE, MUST BE BROKEN TO CONFORM TO THE IDEA.... STALINIST ANALYSIS, AT ITS MOST DEGENERATE, BECOMES A SCHOLASTIC EXERCISE, THE SEARCH FOR 'FORMULATIONS' 'CORRECT' IN RELATION TO TEXT BUT NOT TO LIFE.... IT WAS MECHANICAL IDEALISM SUCH AS THIS, MOUNTED ON SOVIET TANKS, WHICH FIRED THROUGH THE SMOKE AT THE WORKERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE OF BUDAPEST.... THE POLISH AND HUNGARIAN PEOPLE HAVE WRITTEN THEIR CRITIQUE OF STALINISM UPON THEIR STREETS AND SQUARES. IN DOING SO, THEY HAVE BROUGHT BACK HONOUR TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST MOVEMENT." (E.P. Thompson, November 1956)

ABSTRACT

A new generation of neo-Marxist social scientists in Canada have accepted Stanley Ryerson's writings on Canadian history without questioning his philosophical and theoretical premises. Specifically, Ryerson's work is abstracted from the political and theoretical context in which it must be understood -- the tradition of Stalinist Marxism.

This thesis critically reviews the major features of Stalin's interpretation of historical materialism, contrasting them with Marx's original argument. By contrasting Stalin and Marx on the problem of historical explanation, as well as such key concepts as "social relations of production," "productive forces," and "base and superstructure," the possibility for examining Ryerson's philosophical and methodological perspectives is established.

Placing Ryerson in the context of Stalinist orthodoxy within the Communist Party of Canada, his theoretical and historical writings from 1935 to 1968 are discussed. A review of material from Ryerson's A World To Win demonstrates his total adherence to Stalin's version of Marxism, while the book 1837: The Birth of Canadian Democracy is shown to be a historicized popularization of the Comintern's Popular Front strategy. The development of the Communist Party's People's History project is traced throughout the

1940s and 1950s illustrating the origins of Ryerson's books
The Founding of Canada and Unequal Union.

Through an investigation of Ryerson's writings on the Party crises in 1956 and 1968, as well as the decade in between, his continued adherence to Stalin's interpretation of Marxism is documented. The difficulties such a theoretical framework poses are illustrated in a treatment of Ryerson's analysis of the 1837-1838 rebellions as presented in Unequal Union.

A selective look at Ryerson's writings since his 1971 resignation from the Communist Party suggests that Ryerson's developing critique of Stalinism failed to penetrate to its core in the distortion of Marx's historical materialism.

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Too seldom have I taken the opportunity to thank some of the people who have assisted me in completing this research, to forego the chance offered by its completion.

Both my thesis supervisors, Professors Don Whyte and Wallace Clement, displayed great patience with my many efforts to wander into tangential areas, and provided sound advice I sometimes foolishly neglected. Professor Joe Levitt has been a constant source of encouragement and intellectual stimulation since our first encounter four years ago.

On another level, many of my comrades in the International Socialists have made valuable contributions to this thesis. Robin Wylie shared his knowledge of Canadian History, David McNally shared his knowledge of the Canadian Left and Marxist theory, while Abbie Bakan sharpened my political sense. Other comrades generously gave of their time to aid me.

My greatest thanks are reserved for Barbara Leimsner whose mark is found on every facet of the thesis, and whose unwavering encouragement was a much needed source of strength.

Brian McDougall
September, 1981

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABSTRACT	7
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	
 <u>PART I - INTRODUCTION</u>	
CHAPTER I - STANLEY RYERSON AND CANADIAN MARXISM	1
CHAPTER II - RYERSON'S EARLY YEARS AND THE RISE OF STALINISM IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CANADA	20
 <u>PART II - MARX AND STALIN ON THE MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY</u>	
CHAPTER III - THE PREMISES OF THE MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY AND THE NOTION OF "PRODUCTION IN GENERAL" ..	37
CHAPTER IV - THE LABOUR PROCESS, AND THE UNITY OF THE MATERIAL AND SOCIAL SIDES OF PRODUCTION	65
CHAPTER V - THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION, PROPERTY AND TECHNICISM	77
CHAPTER VI - BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE, AND THE PARTY USES OF THEORY: THE DOCTRINE OF 'PARTIINOST'	117
CHAPTER VII - THE PRODUCTIVE FORCES, AND THE DRIVING FORCE OF HISTORY	150
 <u>PART III - RYERSON AND THE STALINIST DISTORTION OF MARXISM</u>	
CHAPTER VIII - RYERSON AND STALINIST PHILOSOPHY: "A WORLD TO WIN"	182
CHAPTER IX - THE PARTY USES OF HISTORY: RYERSON'S <u>1837: THE BIRTH OF</u> <u>CANADIAN DEMOCRACY</u> AND THE POPULAR FRONT	217
CHAPTER X - RYERSON AND THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF CANADA PROJECT	264

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Cont'd)

	<u>Page</u>
CHAPTER XI - RYERSON'S INTELLECTUAL DRIFT DURING THE DECADE OF THE CPC'S 'LIBERALIZATION'	320
CHAPTER XII - RYERSON'S UNEQUAL UNION	353
PART IV - CONCLUSION: 1968 AND AFTER	
CHAPTER XIII - 1968 AND AFTER: THE PARTIAL BREAK WITH STALINIST THEORY.....	416
CHAPTER XIV - CONCLUSION	441

APPENDIX

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PART I - INTRODUCTION

1

CHAPTER I

STANLEY RYERSON AND CANADIAN MARXISM

The young historians and social scientists in English Canada who embraced Marxism as their theoretical framework during the seventies have recently begun to take stock of their accomplishments, claiming recognition as an established part of academe. Part of the process has involved their claim to be the inheritors of a legitimate and indigenous Canadian tradition of radical social thought. The work of Stanley Ryerson has been claimed as an important part of their intellectual heritage (the other Canadian intellectuals most often mentioned as forerunners of the contemporary currents of Marxist political economy and Marxist social history are Gustavus Myers, C.B. Macpherson and H. Clare Pentland).

Two recent surveys of Canadian political economy both recognize the pre-1968 writings of Stanley Ryerson as crucial to the development of a Marxist analysis of Canadian development. In his essay "Rediscovering Canadian Political Economy", Daniel Drache says of Ryerson's book Unequal Union that it

provides us with a seminal analysis of Canada's political development during part of its critically formative years. Ryerson's work is the most successful attempt so far to develop a new historiography covering the period 1815-1880. It presents a coherent overview of the political, economic and cultural forces prior to and following Confederation....¹

However, in a somewhat idiosyncratic periodisation of intellectual history, Drache includes Ryerson's Unequal Union as part of "the New Political Economy" typified by the work of Naylor, Clement, Watkins, and other young academic Marxists of the seventies.² This in spite of the fact that Unequal Union is a product of an older current of Communist Party theory, the book having been completed in 1968, while Ryerson was still a leading figure in the Party. On the other hand, Wallace Clement's recent "Canadian Class Cleavages: An Assessment and Contribution," implicitly designates Ryerson's work as part of the Marxist tradition of class analysis, upon which the seventies revival of political economy has been based.³

In a similar vein, the "Editorial Statement" in the inaugural issue of the new journal Studies in Political Economy: A Socialist Review identified Ryerson as one of a select group of theorists whose work gave the expression "political economy" its very meaning in the Canadian context:

In Canada, political economy has an established meaning, referring both to an indigenous liberal, yet unorthodox, tradition (in which the name of Harold Innis looms largest) and to an even smaller but highly creative Marxist tradition (as evidenced most powerfully in the work of C.B. Macpherson, H.C. Pentland and Stanley B. Ryerson).⁴

These practitioners of the new political economy have also been joined by Marxist labour and social historians in the identification of Ryerson's work as part of an intellectual

tradition they claim. Most notable in this regard has been Greg Kealey, the editor of Labour/Le Travailleur, and author of a lengthy series of essays reviewing the past and current state of radical history in Canada.⁵ In his recent book, Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism: 1867-1892, Kealey acknowledged a debt to the work of both Pentland and Ryerson:

The following discussion (i.e., Kealey's discussion of the development of industrial capitalism in Southern Ontario, as contained in Part One of his Book -BM) owes much to the brilliant pioneering economic histories of H.C. Pentland and Stanley Ryerson.... Stanley Ryerson, Canada's leading Marxist historian, attempted a brave synthesis (Unequal Union...) which, despite its dismissal by bourgeois historians and the recent attacks on it by left-wing nationalists, remains the best overview of Canadian economic development in the nineteenth century.⁶

Kealey has recently followed these words of high praise with a very positive evaluation of Ryerson's career in his paper "Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson: Canadian Revolutionary Intellectual".⁷

These assessments of the value of Ryerson's work (and in particular, of the volumes The Founding of Canada and Unequal Union) stand in sharp contrast to those made by the mainstream historians who reviewed his publications from the 1930s to the 1960s. Such well-known scholars as Donald Creighton, A.R.M. Lower, Ramsay Cook and Fernand Ouellet (among others) have dismissed Ryerson's books - not solely and not always on the grounds that he has attempted a

specifically Marxist analysis of Canadian history -- but more often on the argument that his work contains "too much of interpretation and not enough of history."⁸ One critic complained in a review of Unequal Union that Ryerson's "conjuring with the class struggle at every stage of Canadian history often seems to go beyond the evidence he is able to offer in support of his thesis."⁹ Not atypical of the reviews was Creighton's 1938 criticisms of Ryerson's first book -- 1837, The Birth of Canadian Democracy:

The task of research

Mr. Ryerson ... has admitted that in no sense can his book claim to be a work of original research. he intimates, would have been "extremely tempting". It might have been tempting; ... and its results would probably have been extremely disconcerting for Mr. Ryerson. As it turned out, however, Mr. Ryerson was able to avoid the temptation of research, for his time was fully occupied in other and more engrossing activities (a reference to Ryerson's political activity as a well known leader of the Communist Party -BM); and being, therefore, relatively uninhibited by documentary evidence, he was able to speak freely about his subject. It seems evident that for him the analysis of Canadian history from the standpoint of Marxism does not consist in the careful reworking of Canadian materials in the light of Marxist principles and with Marxist methods. It appears to mean merely the arbitrary assemblage of haphazardly selected evidence in support of a few given Marxist dogmas.¹⁰

Disregarding the somewhat muted hostility to Marxism, Creighton's criticisms point to a weakness in Ryerson's work which has escaped detection among Marxist academics today -- its own abstract and dogmatic character. Even if we make some allowance for an "anti-theory bias" among mainstream historians,

the consistency with which Ryerson has been criticized for a shortage of evidence is striking.

This is a point on which Ryerson himself may seem to have indirectly conceded some ground. In an article written in the aftermath of the events of 1956 (i.e., Khrushchev's secret speech about Stalin and the "cult of the individual", the Soviet invasion of Hungary, and the mass resignations from the Canadian Communist Party (CPC)), Ryerson engaged in some soul searching regarding his party's past intellectual work:

To my mind, the most insidious expression of dogmatism in our work has been the deep seated habit of simply relying on a "general" knowledge of Marxism with which to solve problems. Our leadership (of whom Ryerson was a member -BM) has not been characterised by serious, consistent effort to deepen its own grasp of political economy, or philosophy, or other areas of theory. And study of Canada and specific Canadian problems ... is either neglected entirely, or only undertaken sporadically.... Another, not unimportant element in our theoretical sluggishness has been the attitude ... of uncritical dependence on theoretical leadership by Marxists abroad and above all in the Soviet Union. The antidote to this ... is to draw from the recent jolts to our complacency a new recognition of our own responsibility to think for ourselves and even to aspire to make some contribution to international Marxist thinking.¹¹

In Ryerson's appraisal of the intellectual work done by Party theoreticians (his own included) "dogmatism" is identified as a serious problem. Yet for Ryerson, this "dogmatism" stems not primarily from inadequate attention to empirical evidence (as Creighton and others had charged), but from unsophisticated

theory. Neither variety of dogmatism has been recognized as a feature of Ryerson's work by Marxist social historians and political economists, though an inattention to empirical evidence and a flawed theoretical framework underly all of Ryerson's work up to and including Unequal Union. Ryerson's difficulties, I will argue, can best be understood as the product of a political and intellectual career in the service of a Stalinist version of Marxism. Drache, Clement, Kealey and even the mainstream historians have all failed to recognize the thread of dogmatic Stalinism that runs through Ryerson's writings. In their haste to establish an indigenous Canadian Marxist intellectual tradition, many of the Marxist historians and social scientists have uncritically (and perhaps unwittingly) accepted the political, methodological and theoretical premises upon which Ryerson's work is based. Even though Ryerson's writings have not spawned a 'school' of analysis, his work --taken together with that of Tom Naylor -- has established the boundaries within which neo-Marxists debated the nineteenth century origins of Canadian capitalism.

Ryerson did not leave the Communist Party of Canada until 1971, after almost 40 years as a leading member, and several years after completing his two volumes on Canadian history (i.e., The Founding of Canada and Unequal Union). More importantly, Ryerson's break with the politics and theory of Stalinist Marxism came late, developed gradually, and was only superficial. When thousands of intellectuals abandoned the Communist movement in 1956, in the wake of Krushchev's revelations about Stalin, Ryerson remained in the Communist Party of Canada. From 1956 until 1969 he was an active leader

of the Party, seeking to inject a new theoretical and political vigour into what remained of a shrinking organisation. His efforts ended in 1969, in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, and the Party leadership's efforts to tighten discipline and stifle the 'liberalism' that had characterized the organization's internal life since 1957. As a result, Ryerson drifted out of the CPC and into an academic career as a Marxist historian at the University of Quebec at Montreal.

Drache, Clement and the editors of Studies in Political Economy all ignore Ryerson's Communist affiliation in assessing the character of his work. This tendency to evaluate 'Ryerson the Canadian historian' while ignoring 'Ryerson the orthodox Communist theorist and political leader' has made a critical assessment of his contribution to the revival of Canadian Marxism impossible. This willingness to abstract Ryerson's ideas from their political context not only betrays a quite un-Marxian approach to the history of ideas, it also sanctions the uncritical appropriation of a seriously flawed Marxism as a basis for the "new political economy" and the "new social history".

No analysis of the work of a Communist Party historian like Ryerson can be attempted without connecting it with the theoretical views and practical politics of the Communist Parties under Stalin; this is particularly true in Ryerson's case. For he, unlike some of the now famous historians of the

British CP's historians' group (people like E.P. Thompson, John Saville, George Rude, Christopher Hill etc., all of whom left the Communist Party in 1956), was not simply a Party intellectual. Rather, he was a full time paid official who spent many years on the highest leadership bodies in the Canadian Party. Ryerson would never have the time or the political detachment to allow him to write, for example, anything comparable to E.P. Thompson's biographical study William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary. (published in 1955).¹²

All of Ryerson's theoretical work, including each of his six books* written before 1968 was directly tied to the day to day issues that arose from his activity as a Party leader. In that sense -- and this is argued in detail below -- Ryerson was an intellectual who, in having become a Party leader, took up the necessary historical work that nobody else in the CPC seemed capable or willing to do. The "official" historical work that resulted is the product of the efforts of a Party bureaucrat turned part-time historian, rather than the polished historical work being done within the historians' group in the British CP.

* Ryerson's six books are 1837: The Birth of Canadian Democracy (1937); French Canada: A Study in Canadian Democracy (1943); A World to Win: An Introduction to the Science of Socialism (1946); The Founding of Canada: Beginnings to 1815 (1960); The Open Society: Paradox and Challenge (1965); and Unequal Union: Confederation and the Roots of Conflict in the Canadas, 1815-1873 (1968).

More surprising than the appraisal of Ryerson by the political economists is Greg Kealey's glowing evaluation of Ryerson's writings in his recent paper, "Stanley Brehaut Ryerson: Canadian Revolutionary Intellectual". Surprising, because the new Marxist social history -- with which Kealey is so closely identified -- has consciously patterned itself after the resolutely anti-Stalinist tradition of historiography associated with the work of E.P. Thompson. Whatever the political and theoretical problems of Thompson's "socialist-humanism" -- and there are many¹³ -- his radical re-assertion of the priority of the human subject in history, with his emphasis upon culture and consciousness, challenged the politics of a reformist and bureaucratized Communist movement which was totally hostile to the self-activity of the working class. His work sought to re-establish the existence and history of revolutionary aspirations on the part of the working class. On one occasion, Kealey (and Hann) summarized what they believed to be Thompson's theoretical contribution to the new social history in Canada, in the following terms:

*Rejecting a mechanistic notion of class as a 'thing' he termed 'class consciousness' the embodiment in 'traditions, value systems, ideas, and institutional forms' of the responses of the English working class to the acute social changes of industrialization. He insisted that the concept of class refer to specific historical relationships and that it not be used in a general sense to give to historical analysis the semblance of 'sylogism'. He breathed new life into the British tradition of careful empirical inquiry into social conditions by harnessing that inquiry to a sophisticated Marxism.¹⁴

The features of Thompson's work here praised -- the rejection of a reified concept of class, the willingness to investigate the cultural dimension of class relations, and the embrace of careful empirical enquiry -- are all foreign to Ryerson's writings. Herein lies the dilemma: why are Kealey and the other Marxist academics so willing to embrace the work of Ryerson and Thompson at the same time? The obvious answer is that they do not fully appreciate the Stalinist conception of history which underlies Ryerson's theoretical and methodological assumptions.

Another possibility, of course, is that Kealey and others detect a theoretical break in Ryerson's work, a point at which Ryerson consciously rejected the theoretical framework that he had operated with during the Stalin era. This suggestion underlies Kealey's complementary assessment of Ryerson's work, even though it is unstated. What is astonishing is that none of the commentators on Ryerson's work (with the notable exception of Penner's The Canadian Left) has even mentioned his explicit devotion to Stalin's version of Marxism in the pre-1956 period.^{14a}

In this thesis my primary concern is to establish that Ryerson's writings must be considered within the context of the Stalinist tradition of Marxism. Even such post 1956 writings as his Unequal Union reflect an understanding of Marx's materialist conception of history gained through the

prism of Stalinism as a political and intellectual current. By examining the theoretical conception of Marxism underlying Ryerson's historical writings, I seek to demonstrate the essential theoretical continuity between Ryerson's writings in the era of Stalin (i.e., before 1956) and the articles and books he penned during the decade before he left the Communist Party in 1971. My contention is that Ryerson's original acceptance of Stalin's version of Marxism means that the methodological and theoretical premises underlying his work are fundamentally incompatible with those of Marx.

The entire thesis hinges on an evaluation of the phenomenon of "Stalinism". "Stalinism" has three aspects of particular interest to the project at hand. First of all, Stalinism stands as that set of political practices developed as the legacy of Stalin's supervision of the state capitalist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union from the late 1920's to his death in 1953.¹⁵ In addition, it consists of the political practices and tradition established by the Soviet dominated and led Communist Parties outside the Soviet Union during the same period. Thus Stalinism represents the political practice of an entire movement, rather than simply the proclivities of a single man. Above all, Stalinism is a product of the defeat and demoralization of the workers' state established in Russia in 1917, and the subsequent defeat and demoralization of the revolutionary aspirations of the European working class.

to which the Bolsheviks tied their fate.¹⁶

Secondly, Stalinism is a set of ideas, a theoretical interpretation both of the history of the working class movement, and of the corpus of ideas that has become known as "Marxism". It is as a set of common theoretical assumptions regarding the character of Marxism and the nature of socialism that Stalinism (and the many varieties of what might be called "neo-Stalinism") is still influential within North America.

At the hands of Stalin, Marx's materialist conception of history -- and in particular, the conception of human production which informed his work -- has been systematically distorted. Stalin's Marxism amounted to a crude and thoroughly undialectical technological determinism, supplemented by an equally crude idealism. By employing abstract formulae, like the "contradiction between the forces and relations of production", elevating them to the level of metaphysical and cosmological truths, Communist theorists violated Marx's commitment to a theory informed by empirical research. The cosmological laws of dialectical materialism, from which the universal 'laws of motion' of all history were deduced, insured that Party intellectuals would have a reductionist understanding of some of Marx's most important concepts, like the "labour process", the "forces of production", the "social relations of production", and "superstructural"

phenomena like the state. In short, Stalinist Marxism operated with such a pre-determined and transhistorical battery of laws that Communist historians typically vacillated between invoking Marxist terms as an embellishment to their basic research or using the 'laws' of history to construct an historical justification for the current political line through a judicious selection of facts. As we shall see, Ryerson can justifiably be accused of both.

In addition to being a set of ideas about Marxism, Stalinism includes a peculiar evaluation of the purpose and character of theory, as summarized in the notion of partiinost (the Russian word meaning, literally, "partymindedness"). This doctrine, which is discussed below, essentially relegates theory to a role of justifying or confirming the pragmatic political positions of the Party as being completely consistent with the 'unchanging laws of Marxism', and based upon the strictest empirical investigation. (The same notion of the systematic subordination of theory to the pragmatic political interests of the moment is discussed by Penner in his book The Canadian Left.)¹⁷ In reality, the theoretical work the Stalinist tradition produces is premised upon a hopelessly metaphysical and vague set of principles, and takes empirical research as being valuable only to the extent that it yields confirmation of the pre-existing theory.

Ryerson's intellectual concerns extended far beyond the field of Canadian history. As the leading intellectual

in the Canadian Communist Party (hereafter referred to as the 'CPC') for at least thirty years, Ryerson's writings included frequent references to methodological and philosophical problems. Yet Ryerson is usually only considered either in his capacity as a historian or as a political leader of the CPC. His methodological and philosophical concerns, his very understanding of Marxism, have not been subjected to scrutiny. This thesis investigates some critical aspects of the materialist conception of history as developed in the writings of Marx and Stalin, to establish that Ryerson's historical work is best understood as a product of the Stalinist tradition. Put differently, Ryerson's work owes virtually everything to Stalin, and little (but the rhetoric) to Marx.

This rather harsh judgement has to be tempered with a certain respect for the breadth of Ryerson's intellectual efforts, and more than a bit of regret that his considerable abilities had not been better informed, and more constructively utilised outside the Stalinist Communist Party. Even though Ryerson's work to this day bears the unmistakable imprint of his past, not every Stalinist theoretician was a Ryerson.

I neither attempt to account for Ryerson's every printed word, nor try to demonstrate that Ryerson had something to say on each aspect of historical materialism where Stalin:

and Marx diverged. Indeed, the portion of the thesis devoted to contrasting Stalin and Marx encompasses a variety of arguments only peripherally touched upon in the subsequent discussion of Ryerson's work. This is of necessity, since Canadian Communism's premiere intellectual ~~author~~ wrote a book on either the materialist conception of history, Marx or Stalin. His general interpretation of Marxism can only be pieced together from books and articles, having first established the dominant influence of Stalin within the Communist movement. Since Ryerson's writings on historical materialism are so partial and fragmentary, I analyse them in the general context established in the comparative section on Marx and Stalin.

Ryerson's writings provide the material for a study in the Stalinist character of the Communist Party's Marxism. The remainder of Part I examines the early history of the Communist Party of Canada and how it became "Stalinized", in addition to providing a biographical sketch of Ryerson's career as a Communist. This sets the stage for Part II, in which Stalin's version of the materialist conception of history is contrasted with the original, through a discussion of some key concepts in Marxist theory, including: "production in general", "labour process", "social relations of production", and "forces of production." The origins of the technicist interpretation of Marxism that Stalin popularized are indicated in an Appendix.

Having established through comparison that Stalin's version of the materialist conception of history bears little

resemblance to Marx's, the thesis then turns to a discussion of Ryerson's writings in Part III. The discussion opens with a consideration of Ryerson's basic outline of Marxist theory in A World To Win. The remainder of the argument is structured around the three key examples of Ryerson's historical work: the depression era publication of the book 1837; the origins and history of the Peoples' History of Canada project from the 1940s to the 1960 publication of The Founding of Canada; and finally, the 1968 publication of Unequal Union tradition. Throughout the thesis, I avoid moving beyond an examination and critique of Ryerson's understanding of historical materialism to the still essential task of providing an alternative account of the historical development of Canadian Capitalism. Such an undertaking is impossible in the context of this thesis, since Ryerson's work covers an historical period of over 500 years. Only in the discussion of Unequal Union do I stray from a purely methodological and theoretical investigation of Ryerson's work to illustrate some of the problems with a portion of his historical analysis -- that contained in Part I of Unequal Union, dealing with the rebellions of 1837-1838. Writing a specifically Marxist account of Canadian history is a project left for someone else.

Finally, Ryerson's extensive writings throughout the decade since he left the Communist Party are not reviewed in

any detail. In Part IV a few articles are briefly discussed solely to establish that he has not undertaken anything like a systematic re-appraisal of his previous writings, despite an increasingly critical stance towards the Soviet Union.

The Conclusion establishes some of the principle features of Ryerson's work which identify it as a product of the Stalinist tradition, and which provide it with a continuity from the earliest period through to the publication of Unequal Union.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER I

1. "Rediscovering Canadian Political Economy", by Daniel Drache, in A Practical Guide to Canadian Political Economy, ed. by W. Clement and D. Drache, Lorimer, 1978, page 35. Stanley Ryerson has written six books/pamphlets, including: 1837: The Birth of Canadian Democracy, Francis White, 1937; French Canada: A Study in Canadian Democracy, Progress Books, 1943; A world to Win: An Introduction to the Science of Socialism, Progress Books, 1946; The Open Society: Paradox and Challenge, International Publishers, 1965; The Founding of Canada: Beginnings to 1815, Progress Books, 1960; and Unequal Union: Confederation and the Roots of the Conflict in the Canadas, 1815-1873, Progress Books, 1968.
2. Drache, page 3.
3. "Canadian Class Cleavages", Wallace Clement, unpublished, pages 1-2.
4. Studies in Political Economy, Editorial Statement, Volume 1 #1, page vi.
5. Kealey's writings can be found in a series of writings, including: Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism 1867-1892, University of Toronto Press, 1980; "The Working Class in Recent Canadian Historical Writing", Acadensis, Spring 1978; the "Introduction" to Primary Sources in Canadian Working Class History 1860-1930, Dumont Press, 1973, with Russell Hann, Linda Kealey, and Peter Warrian; the "Introduction" to Essays in Canadian Working Class History, ed. by G. Kealey and Peter Warrian, McClelland and Stewart, 1976; "Looking Backward: Reflections on the Study of Class in Canada", in History and Social Science Teacher, Volume 16 #4, summer 1981; and "Stanley Brehaut Ryerson: Canadian Revolutionary Intellectual", paper presented to the annual Canadian Political Science Association meetings, May 1981.
6. see Kealey's book, Toronto..., op. cit., page 337, footnote #2.
7. Kealey, "Stanley Brehaut...", op. cit.
8. see the following reviews: of 1837..., Donald Creighton, in Canadian Historical Review, Volume 19, 1938, page 73-74; and Canadian Forum, December 1938, pages 296-7, no author. French Canada... was reviewed by A.R.M. Lower in the Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science,

Volume 10, 1944, page 529; and in the Canadian Historical Review, by B.K. Sandwell, Volume 2, 194, pages 200-1. The Founding of Canada was reviewed by Gustave Lanctot in the Canadian Historical Review, Volume 42, 1961, page 147, and by Robin Winks in the American Historical Review, Volume 66, 1960-1, pages 1075-6. Finally, Unequal Union was reviewed by Fernand Ouellet in the Canadian Historical Review, 1969, pages 316-320, and by Ramsay Cook, in the American Historical Review, Volume 74, 1969, pages 1753-4.

9. See Cook review, op. cit.
10. Creighton, page 73.
11. "Our Program and Our Study of Marxism", Stanley Ryerson, in Marxist Review, Volume 15, #6, 1957, page 42-3.
12. William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, by E.P. Thompson Pantheon, 1955; for an account of the historians group in the British Communist Party, see the essay by Eric Hobsbawm "The Historians' Group of the Communist Party", in Rebels and Their Causes, ed. by Maurice Cornforth, Lawrence and Wishart, 1978. Also see Communism and British Intellectuals, by Neal Wood, Columbia University Press, 1959.
13. For some of the problems of E.P. Thompson's "socialist humanism" see Arguments Within English Marxism, by Perry Anderson, New Left Books, 1980.
14. See Hann, Kealey, Kealey and Warrian, op. cit., page 12.
- 14a. The most important commentators on Ryerson's work are Kealey, in his "Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson ..." mentioned above, Penner, in his The Canadian Left, and Vivian McCaffrey, "Stanley B. Ryerson: Marxist Intellectual and the French Canadian National Question," unpublished MA Thesis at The University of Ottawa, 1981.
15. The state capitalist analysis of the Soviet Union is developed in State Capitalism in Russia, by Tony Cliff, Pluto Press, 1974.
16. See The American Communist Party, by Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, Praeger, 1957, page 522.
17. See Norman Penner's The Canadian Left, Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1977, pages 80-82.

CHAPTER II

RYERSON'S EARLY YEARS AND THE RISE OF STALINISM
IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CANADA

Stanley Ryerson was born into a well-established Toronto family in 1911. After the publication of his first book, the Daily Clarion (the Communist newspaper) described him in the following way in an article entitled "Stanley B. Ryerson / Author of New Book, Brilliant Personality":

A fifth generation Canadian; the son of an associate dean of the University of Toronto; the great grandson of that outstanding Canadian revolutionary and educationist, Egerton Ryerson; at the age of 11 a precocious bookworm who knew by memory the discourses of the Roman philosopher Epictetus; at 14 a serious youngster filled with ambitions of becoming a great painter; at 22 the author of a thesis on the Italian peasant novelist, Verga; at 24 the secretary of the Communist party of Quebec; at 26 a pioneer in the Marxist analysis of Canadian history, -- that is Stanley Brehaut Ryerson....¹

After attending Upper Canada College, and studying modern languages at the University of Toronto, Ryerson spent the academic year 1931-32 at the Sorbonne, before graduating in 1933. It was during his stay in Paris that Ryerson was politicized by his concern about the impact of the capitalist crisis on culture and art. In a 1937 interview, Ryerson explained:

The realization that the cultural values of art and literature were being turned by capitalism into what I can only describe as spiritual onanism, and the discovery that Communism, by solving the material problems of society, was the one path to a future creative renaissance, was the first impulse.

The example of the Soviet Union, as portrayed in a pamphlet, *La Revolution Culturelle*, which with the Communist Manifesto, I read in 1931 in Paris, completely convinced me of this. I entered the movement in Paris, read voraciously, attended meetings and demonstrations and on returning home in '32 entered the Young Communist League and shortly thereafter the Communist Party.²

In addition to joining the Communist Party of Canada, Ryerson's interest in art and culture encouraged him to participate in the formation of the Progressive Arts Club -- a monthly magazine called Masses, which was published by Ryerson together with Dorothy Livesay, Oscar Ryan, and about 30 other people.

The club, in reality an offshoot of a discussion group that had been in existence since 1928, provided an opportunity for members to discuss and articulate the proper concerns for literature both in the present and in the new age that was to follow. Masses provided a vehicle for that literature. The Progressive Arts Club had a section for writers, another for artists, and a third for theatre workers. Similar Progressive Arts Clubs sprang up over the next year in Winnipeg, Montreal, Vancouver, Halifax and London as well as in several small Ontario centers. An offshoot from the Progressive Arts Club was the Workers' Experimental theatre.... Most of the plays produced followed closely the patterns of international workers theatre, but many were written by Canadians.... A number of the founding members of the Progressive Arts Club wrote agit-prop plays. Among them were Stanley Ryerson, who wrote *War in the East*....³

Ryerson's experience with the European Communist movement was strengthened when he returned to Paris in 1933.

When he finished his fourth year at Toronto, the Government of France gave him a scholarship to take post graduate work at the Sorbonne in 1933-34, when he took his Diplome D'Etudes Supérieures, writing his thesis on the Italian peasant novelist, Verga.⁴

During his second stay in France, Ryerson witnessed the rise of the fascist right in France, and the first cautious steps by French Communists toward the establishment of a People's Front against the right. At the same time he wrote for L'Avant-Garde and was active around the World Committee Against War and Fascism.⁵

In 1934, at the age of 23, Ryerson returned to commence teaching French at Sir George Williams' University in Montreal. At the same time, he became "director of organization, propaganda and education" in the Quebec wing of the party. Soon he was assistant editor and a regular contributor to the newly established French language Communist paper, Clarte, writing under the name "E. Roger".⁶ In 1936 his academic career abruptly ended when university officials discovered he was a Communist, and Ryerson became a full time party functionary as provincial Secretary of the Quebec wing of the CPC. In that capacity, he also became one of the Party's most important leaders and propagandists, and the first to attempt any kind of Marxist analysis of Canadian history. During his almost forty years in the party (1932-1971), Ryerson wrote six books, at least 65 journal articles, several pamphlets, and innumerable newspaper articles, covering a broad range of issues.

From 1937 until the mid-forties, Ryerson lived and worked in Montreal as the top party representative. After

going underground when the Communist Party was declared illegal during the war, Ryerson moved to Toronto, where he remained until 1969.⁷ During those years, he filled a variety of posts in the upper echelons of the Party, including membership on the Party's highest body, the Central Executive Committee, National Director of Education (from 1944 to 1947), National Organizational Director (from 1947 until 1954), Managing Editor of the Party's theoretical journal National Affairs Monthly (between 1944 and 1947). Between 1962 and 1969, he was both the Director of the Communist Party's Marxist Study Centre and Editor of the Party's theoretical journal -- variously named Horizons and The Marxist Quarterly. In 1971 he resigned from the Communist Party; several years earlier he had joined the History Department at the University of Quebec in Montreal.

The Stalinization of Canadian and International Communism

The Communist Party which Ryerson joined during the early years of the depression had, by then, existed for more than a decade -- in many ways the most important decade of its history. It had been formed in 1921 in the aftermath of the Russian revolution, as a Leninist "party of the new type". As such it claimed to be a part of the international Communist movement seeking to overcome the legacy of the Social Democratic past, both in theory as well as in practice.

However, before the Canadian CP could really appropriate the lessons of Lenin's theoretical and political break with Social Democracy, it was transformed into one of many pawns in Stalin's struggle for supremacy within the Soviet Party and the Russian state.⁸ By the end of the twenties, the CPC was firmly under the control of Stalin's local defender -- Tim Buck.

Although the Communist International developed detailed analyses of the way in which Bolshevism was to be applied in a variety of areas -- strategy and tactics, the role of the party, social democracy, parliamentarism, trade union work, the national question, the peasant question, etc. - Canadian Communists displayed little ability to get behind the words and formulae to understand the Bolshevik spirit which motivated Communist Politics. As Angus explains, many of the class conscious workers who flocked to the Communist movement in the early years

saw only the seizure of power (in Russia -BM). They could not see the years of preparatory work that created the Bolshevik party and won it the support of the majority of the Russian workers. They saw Lenin's intransigent opposition to the leaders of the Second International. They did not see his years of work to defeat sectarian policies which could have isolated the party from the Russian masses. They saw the Bolshevik call for power to the Soviets.... They did not see the years in which the Bolsheviks participated in even the pseudo-parliaments permitted under Czarist rule. They saw the Bolsheviks lead an insurrection. They did not see the careful planning that went into it, the preparation that even included preventing a premature uprising only months before they took power.^{8a}

As the Russian revolution foundered on the reality of the strength of the Russian peasantry, the decimation of the working class that had made the revolution, and the failure of the revolution in Western Europe, that Bolshevik spirit began to disappear. As the degeneration of the revolution proceeded through the early and mid-twenties, the Bolshevik party came increasingly under the sway of an emerging party and state bureaucracy - the embryo of what would become a new state capitalist ruling class headed by Stalin.⁹

The many writings of Tim Buck on the early history of the CPC document its failures to develop a specifically Bolshevik style Party regarding theoretical issues and debate on the one hand, and political activity, strategy and tactics on the other hand. As Buck tells us, theoretical discussion was virtually absent -- in part, at least -- because the Communist Party was almost totally devoid of intellectuals (i.e., Communists able to follow the theoretical debates in the International movement).

The rapid spread of the Communist movement throughout Canada during the 1920's was accompanied by a certain lowering of its theoretical level. Many workers had been attracted by the practical work.... the activities which proved it to be "A Party of Action" had not been accompanied by equally systematic efforts within the party on the front of theoretical work. The party membership had not yet grasped the full import of Lenin's emphasis upon the fact that "without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."¹⁰

Moreover, many of the theoretical positions the party adopted were incompatible with Bolshevik policies. In the middle of the decade, Buck and several other prominent Canadian Communists initiated a campaign to get the party to champion the cause of Canadian nationalists for "bourgeois independence from Britain."¹¹ Proposing support of Mackenzie King's Liberal party as the necessary prerequisite for the class struggle to go forward, Buck and the others meanwhile ignored the national question in Quebec -- revealing in one stroke both a tendency to make the most elementary theoretical mistakes, and a latent national chauvinism.¹² Many years later, Buck would admit that CPC policy during the late twenties had made "the Communist Party an ideological ally of bourgeois nationalism."¹³ In his 1952 account of the CPC's history, Buck gave the following assessment of its early character:

In its early stages, the party did not yet measure up to the standards established by Lenin, very largely because of the inability of the leaders of the party to free themselves from the sectarian traditions of the revolutionary movement in Canada, and the ideological influence of the bourgeoisie. To overcome those weaknesses ... required a more critical and self-critical attitude on the part of all party members towards the party itself. In the early 1920's we did not yet understand that systematic use of criticism and self-criticism is "the law of growth of communist parties". It took some years of Stalin's patient, persistent teaching to achieve that understanding.¹⁴

In his own way, Buck confirms that the decade of the 1920's was the period in which the CPC came under the sway of Stalin.

Beginning with his 1924 Problems of Leninism, Stalin waged a campaign on behalf of the idea that just as capitalism could be overthrown in a single country likewise socialism could be built in one country. The Stalinist position, summarized in the slogan "Socialism in one country", countered the influence of Trotsky's internationalist commitment to creating the material foundation for socialism by exporting the revolution, and made Trotsky seem like a pessimist. In spite of Lenin's post-1917 adherence to Trotsky's view that the revolution must be permanent, Stalin's view of socialism in one country offered the hope of peace and stability to the party machine which had emerged.¹⁵ Trotsky's internationalism seemed to promise only more upheaval in a period when the international defeat of the revolution (in Germany and elsewhere) and its domestic degeneration, meant the commitment to revolutionary struggle was waning.

At the fifth world congress of the Comintern (held in July 1924), Trotsky was found guilty of deviations from Leninism (as formulated by the faction led by Stalin), while the national sections were instructed to "bolshévize" themselves. As one commentator has observed,

For the Comintern "socialism in one country" was translated into the term "bolshévization". It meant in a general sense that the Bolshevik party was to be the model for the movement and that the preservation and development of the Soviet Union was to be its end. More specifically, and practically, for a party to bolshévize itself after 1924 was to attune itself to the dominant faction in the Bolshevik power struggle.¹⁶

Since Trotsky had been accused by the Russian party majority of not being a true Bolshevik, the parties were put on notice to expunge similar deviations and to align themselves unquestioningly with the "correct" tendency in the Russian party. Bolshevization also meant that the parties were to attune themselves to the needs of Soviet Russia at home and abroad and that the ECCI (i.e., the Comintern executive -BM) was the only interpreter of these needs for each particular time and place. As experience was to show rather quickly, this watchword disguised a tactic for destroying the independence of all parties through a playing off of factions against each other. The blind obedience required by Moscow ... subsequently was refused by most communist leaders of talent and independent mind. By the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in 1928, mainly the servile and fifth rate had been maneuvered into power in the parties.¹⁷

Through the years from 1924 until Stalin's decisive victory over Trotsky in 1928, there was virtually constant turmoil in the international communist movement, as the various factions of the Russian party sought to improve the fortunes of their followers in the leadership of the other parties. The Bolshevization of the Comintern was considered completed after Stalin's defeat first of Trotsky, and then of Bukharin. "The result was Soviet Russian mastery of the Comintern, docile parties, and subservient leaderships."¹⁸ In the process, Stalin also disposed of such lesser lights as Zinoviev, Kamenev and Radek, after using them as weapons in his struggle.

On determining that capitalism was undergoing a period of relative stabilization after 1923, the Comintern under Stalin's influence centralized its organization and undermined

local initiatives in the national parties. The latter,

 were domesticated to the point of being incapable of any initiative. Leaders came to the fore whose most distinctive quality was the ability to read the signs of the power struggle in the Kremlin and to trim their parties' sails accordingly.... In (Stalin's view -BM) ... the Soviet Politburo was the natural initiator of policy, the Comintern and member parties the passive executors of tactics or, as circumstances might dictate, simply bystanders. If socialism in one country was translated for the Comintern as bolshevization leading to a passive acceptance of Soviet leadership, it was also interpreted as the imperative to "protect the first socialist state". In practice this formulation meant that the foreign political needs of Soviet Russia had a prior claim on the communist parties before their purely domestic needs or possibilities....¹⁹

In the Canadian CP, the bolshevization campaign was carried out through the latter half of the twenties, culminating with the expulsion of the Party's two top leaders Maurice Spector in 1928 and John Macdonald in 1930.²⁰ In his book Canadian Bolsheviks Angus contrasts the independence shown by these early leaders of the CPC with the servility of the Stalinists who seized control of the Party after 1928, placing the Stalinist takeover in the context of the crisis which hit the CPC between 1928 and 1931. He writes:

Between the Communist Party of the thirties and the party that bore the same name in the twenties lay a vast gulf, marked by the crisis of 1928-1931. During those years the party lost a majority of its membership (down from 2900 members to less than 1400 in 1931 -BM), expelled most of the men who had led the party in its first decade, and radically changed its program.

 The groundwork for the crisis had been laid between 1924 and 1928, when the party gradually abandoned its political principles in response to the shifting requirements of Soviet foreign policy. The crisis was prepared by the cynicism

that allowed the party leaders to vote to condemn Trotsky even though they did not know his views....

The crisis broke into the open in November 1928, with the expulsion of Maurice Spector. It did not subside until such pioneer Communist leaders as Jack MacDonald, William Moriarity, and Micheal Buhay had been driven from the party, their places taken by Tim Buck and a new generation of Moscow-trained leaders headed by Stewart Smith.²¹

The eventual benefactor of these expulsions was Tim Buck, a man who had become a committed Stalinist and an advocate of the theory of socialism in one country in 1926.²²

Prior to these expulsions, the Comintern had begun to play an active role in the Canadian Party, intervening through its representatives, with letters, and in the person of Canadian Communists trained at the Lenin School in Moscow.²³ By 1927, Canadian party leaders were telling the party's fifth convention that it was vital "to maintain closer connections with the Comintern and the Profintern in the future."²⁴ Rodney's account of CP history during the twenties gives credence to the idea that Spector and Macdonald had constituted a strong and independent party leadership which in some cases ignored Comintern directives -- for example some of those on the bolshevization of the party. (This partially accounts for the weakness of Stalin's bolshevization campaign within the Canadian context, and helps to explain why the CPC could still have a supporter of Trotsky as chairman of the Party and editor of its newspaper, as late as 1928.)

The 1927 convention discussion also sheds light on why Spector and Macdonald failed to make an effective plea to party members to leave the CPC with them. A party education campaign before the fifth convention had failed miserably, while the party leadership continued to suffer from a lack of educated cadres, making "detailed analysis of

the political and economic situation in Canada, and the party's tasks in relation to such an analysis"²⁵ difficult. With the very low level of theoretical sophistication within the CPC, Spector, and later Macdonald had little chance of bypassing the pro-Stalin faction of the party leadership, in an appeal to the party rank and file.²⁶

In addition, the degeneration of the CPC throughout the decade had created the necessary conditions for the Stalinist takeover, given the transmission of the rot within the Russian Party to Canada through the Comintern.

The degeneration of the Communist Party of Canada began ... in the mid-twenties, when the party was only a few years old. The conservatism of the twenties, brought on by the post war boom and the collapse of the labour movement, weakened and demoralized the party, and sent it in search of new paths to revolution. The adoption of the "Canadian Independence" slogan was one such path: when the party leadership ... approved that line, they were setting aside the class struggle principles they had fought for, in quest of an easier road.... The conservatism of Canadian society on one side and the bureaucratization of the Soviet Union on the other caught the party, paralysed it, and squeezed the life out of it. By the time the working class began to move again in Canada, the Communist Party was no longer a communist party.²⁷

The years between 1928 and 1931 were the decisive ones in the CPC's transformation into a loyal section of Stalin's Comintern. Besides the expulsion of the original leadership of the Party and its replacement with young Party functionaries without experience in the pre-Stalin CPC (e.g., like

Sam Carr, Stewart Smith, Leslie Morris, John Weir, Charles Sims, etc.), the CPC also underwent a significant change in the style of leadership. As Angus explains,

The leadership tactics of the Buck-Smith group (i.e., the new leadership -BM) were modeled on those of the Soviet bureaucracy. They replaced education and persuasion with commands. Democratic Centralism was supplanted by bureaucratic centralism; unquestioning submission to the apparatus replaced collective decision-making.²⁸

Along with this change in the style of leadership went the adoption of a "cult of personality" surrounding the party leader, Tim Buck, which paralleled the "cult of personality" around Stalin. Because Communist Party policy under Stalin was based upon pragmatic evaluations of Russia's foreign policy interests rather than political principles, obedience was achieved through commands from a supreme ruler who was promoted as being uniquely qualified to give such commands. In addition, the Stalinization of the Party brought an end to debate and dissenting views within the Party.²⁹

Accompanying the dramatic change in leadership and in the personnel in the Party during the 1928-1931 period was a dramatic change in the Party's politics. With the introduction of the Third Period policies of the Comintern, one of the two pillars of Lenin's United Front strategy -- the need to unite the largest possible portion of the working class in opposition to the ruling class -- was abandoned. The other pillar, the need for the working class to assert its

independent class interests and for a Communist Party to maintain its political independence, was dropped when the Popular Front strategy replaced the Third Period policy in 1935.³⁰

As Stalin's fortunes in the CPSU rose, so did the political importance of his re-interpretation of "Leninism".³¹ When Ryerson joined the CPC in 1932, he was signing on with a thoroughly bolshevized section of the Comintern, in which Stalin's theoretical pronouncements -- as interpreted by the leadership of the CPC -- were gospel.

Stalin's first serious foray into theory came with his successful appropriation of his predecessors during the mid-twenties. In his codification of Leninism, Stalin stressed those elements of Lenin's philosophical legacy which seemed most compatible with the traditional Marxism of the Second International -- for example, Lenin's pre-1914 philosophical writings like Materialism and Empirio-Criticism. Ignored were Lenin's most important contributions to Marxism, his re-affirmation of Marx's principles of self-emancipation and the democratic workers' state as contained in State and Revolution. In his The Foundations of Leninism (1924) and The Problems of Leninism (1926),³² Stalin not only launched his theory of "socialism in one country", in addition he established the idea that Leninism amounted to the experience of the Bolsheviks as interpreted by the party's leadership

(i.e., Stalin). Thus, Leninism was defined as "the theory and tactics of the proletarian revolution in general". This monopolization of the 'correct' understanding of Leninism by Stalin would give him complete control over the Comintern since, as Penner explains,

Stalin codified in catechismal fashion what he considered to be Lenin's thought. Whereas Lenin in "Left Wing" Communism claimed international validity for only "some of the fundamental features" of the Russian experiences, Stalin in the Foundations claimed that all of these features are valid in all countries; and that this is what constituted the term "Leninism".³⁴

Since Stalin could define and redefine at will what constituted Leninism, no party leader anywhere in the world was beyond his reach. Little wonder Penner writes:

The Communist Party of Canada worked, studied, and did its theoretical work, especially after 1928, in the Stalin frame of reference, which means Stalin's definition and conception of Leninism....

And,

Stalin's prestige in the Canadian Communist movement was enormous. He was looked upon as the fountain of all wisdom, and his leadership was never questioned in the slightest. This must be kept in mind in any appraisal of the Communist Party of Canada which grew up and developed in the era not of Lenin but of Stalin. What was eventually called Marxism-Leninism was in fact Stalin's Leninism....³⁵

The Communist Party that Ryerson would join in the early 1930s was a thoroughly bolshevized Party, in which Stalin's interpretation of Marxism was absolutely unquestioned. It was Stalin's Marxism and Stalin's Leninism that Ryerson was schooled in. It is to a consideration of Stalin's interpretation of historical materialism that we now turn.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 2

1. See the Daily Clarion article by Sidney Jordan, Nov. 2, 1937.
2. *ibid*; also see "Dutch and French Strains Blend in this Labor-Progressive Leader," by Carolyn Cox, Saturday Night, March 4, 1944.
3. See David Arnason's Introduction to Dorothy Livesay's book Right Hand, Left Hand, Press Porcepic, 1977. Ryerson's play, "War in the East" is reprinted in Eight Men Speak, ed. by Richard Wright and Robin Endres, New Hogtown Press, 1976.
4. Cox article, *op. cit.*
5. *ibid*; also see the article by Ryerson on Barbusse in The Worker, September 7, 1935, and the book by David Cauter, Communism and the French Intellectuals 1914-1960, Macmillan, 1964.
6. This information is contained in an MA Thesis written by Vivian McCaffrey, "Stanley B. Ryerson: Marxist Intellectual and the French Canadian National Question," University of Ottawa, unpublished, 1981, page 6.
7. *ibid*, footnote 21, page 11.
8. See World Communism, by Franz Borkeneau, Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1971, page 519, and William Rodney's Soldiers of the International, University of Toronto Press, 1968, page 160; also see Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of Communist Party of Canada, by Ian Angus, Vanguard Publications, Montreal, 1981.
- 8a. See Canadian Bolsheviks, page 87.
9. See Cliff's State Capitalism....
10. See Thirty Years: The Story of the Communist Movement in Canada 1922-52, by Tim Buck, Progress Books, 1952, pages 58-59.
11. See Lenin and Canada, by Tim Buck, Progress Books, 19 , pages 71-2.
12. See Norman Penner's The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis, Prentice-Hall, 1977, pages 87 and 110-111.
13. Thirty Years, *op. cit.*, page 77.

14. *ibid.*, p. 37.
15. See Helmut Gruber's Soviet Russia Masters the Comintern, Anchor Books, 1974, pages 5-6.
16. *ibid.*, page xiv.
17. *ibid.*, pages 8-9.
18. *ibid.*, pages xv.
19. *ibid.*, pages 507-8.
20. Rodney's Soldiers ... *op. cit.*, pages 147-158.
21. See Canadian Bolsheviks, pages 199-200.
22. *ibid.*, p. 129.
23. See Rodney, pages 74-75, Penner, pages 92-4, and Avakumovic, The Communist Party in Canada, McClelland and Stewart, 1975, page 49.
24. Cited in Rodney, page 132.
25. Rodney, pages 130-2.
26. *ibid.*, page 145.
27. See Canadian Bolsheviks, pages 324-325.
28. *ibid.*, page 326.
29. *ibid.*, page 327.
30. *Ibid.*, page 329.
31. See the article by Valentino Gerratana, "Stalin, Lenin and 'Leninism'," in New Left Review #103.
32. These writings of Stalin's can be found in Leninism, by Joseph Stalin, George Allen & Unwin, 1926.
33. Cited in Penner, pages 82-3.
34. *ibid.*, pages 80-1.
35. *ibid.*, page 83 and 84.

PART II - MARX AND STALIN ON THE
MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

CHAPTER III

THE PREMISES OF THE MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF
HISTORY AND THE NOTION OF
"PRODUCTION IN GENERAL"

The orthodox Stalinist version of historical materialism consists of an abstract algebra of the interaction of mutually discrete and externally related elements: the forces of production (usually identified as equivalent to the means of production and technology, and human labour as a potential physical force); the relations of production (narrowly defined as rights of property over the material factors of production or property relations); and superstructural phenomena (e.g., the state, ideology, etc.). In this objectivistic account the productive forces are interpreted as the determinative and active element of the economic base (comprised of the forces and relations of production) with the base determining the superstructure, where "determination" means to causally effect in a mechanical fashion. A somewhat more sophisticated version sees the discrete and externally related elements of the model interacting on each other, with the forces of production as determinant over the relations of production (and therefore over the superstructure) in the last instance.¹

History is viewed as the succession of a rigid series of modes of production (a distinct combination of base and superstructure as, for example, in the feudal mode of

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production), the impulse of which resides in the development of contradictions within the base. The spontaneous development of the forces of production are said to create a contradiction between them and the relations of production, overturning the latter and the existing superstructure, and resulting in the establishment of a new mode of production.²

This supra-historical interpretation of the materialist conception of history was canonized in Stalin's essay "Dialectical and Historical Materialism". Premised on a metaphysical and cosmological view of the "laws of motion of all matter", this interpretation and the conception of human production inherent in it, became the standard against which all other theory in the Communist movement was measured. In his book, The Canadian Left, Penner testifies that in this respect, the Canadian CP was no different from any other Communist Party:

The Communist Party of Canada worked, studied, and did its theoretical work, especially after 1928, in the Stalin frame of reference.... Moreover, the Communist Party of Canada, to the extent that it did try to assimilate at least the outlines of Marxist philosophy, did so under the tutelage of ... Stalin's ... twenty five page essay entitled "Dialectical and Historical Materialism". ... this essay became a major source of study in the Canadian Communist movement and virtually replaced all other Marxist works on philosophy.³

By comparing Stalin's version of the materialist conception of history with the original item, we set the stage for understanding Ryerson and his work as an example of

Stalinist Marxism in the Canadian context. A comparison of Stalin and Marx on historical materialism is necessarily a lengthy undertaking since it involves contrasting Stalin's formulation of historical explanations at the level of abstract and metaphysical laws of motion of all history, with Marx's insistence that historical explanation hinges on the analysis of the laws of motion peculiar to different epochs. For Marx, there are general assumptions that can be made about all epochs of history, but these are insufficient to generate historical explanations. For Stalin, the opposite is true. These issues are discussed throughout the following chapter, forming the basis for a discussion of the central concepts of historical materialism. In Chapter Four we move from a discussion about the role of the specific and the general in historical explanation to an examination of the dual character of human production and the concept of the labour process.

Chapter Five takes up Marx's concept of the social relations of production in an attempt to contrast its richness with the narrow and misleading content attributed to it within the Stalinist tradition. Having established that Stalinism assumes a technicist theory of production, we then proceed to investigate two remaining features of the materialist conception of history: the understanding of the base/super-structure model within the Stalinist tradition in Chapter Six

and the concept of the productive forces in Chapter Seven.

My presentation assumes a familiarity with the competing interpretations of Marx's theory of history. The thrust is towards a critique, by way of comparison, of the Stalinist view of human production. The results of Part II then form the necessary basis for ordering and presenting an interpretation of Ryerson's writings as a product of the Stalinist tradition. Every effort has been made to restrict the conceptual level of discussion to Part II, but the analysis of Ryerson stands or falls only on the strength of the prior discussion of the materialist conception of history.

The Real Premises of Human History, and the Difference
Between Transhistorical and Historical Categories

Marx's theoretical investigations led him to argue, in the Grundrisse, that the concept of "production in general" could explain "the general abstract determinations (of human production -BM) which more or less belong to all forms of society". Marx explained,

Whenever we speak of production (or "mode of production" -BM), then, what is meant is always production at a definite state of development -- production by social individuals.... However, all epochs of production have certain common traits, common characteristics. Production in general is an abstraction, but a rational abstraction in so far as it really brings out and fixes the common element ... the determinations valid for production as such ... the identity of the subject, humanity, and of the object, nature....⁴

Marx was careful to distinguish between the general abstract determinations of production in general (what I will call, following Sayer, the "transhistorical") which are features of all modes of production, and the specific concrete determinations of human production as it actually developed during a particular period of human history (the "historical").⁵ Much of the methodological content of the materialist conception of history is devoted to expanding upon and refining this distinction. Marx particularly opposed those schools of thought which attempted to reduce the historical to the transhistorical, creating in the process a completely abstract theory devoid of the rich content of actual historical development. As we shall see, it is precisely this of which Stalin and his followers are guilty.

In the German Ideology and his other early writings Marx developed the "real premises" of his materialist conception of history, premises which he later referred to as the elements of "production in general" -- namely the transhistorical features of all human production:

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity.... The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals.... By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life.

The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the means of subsistence they actually find in existence and have to reproduce.

This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both what they produce and how they produce.... This production... presupposes the intercourse of individuals with one another. The form of this intercourse is again determined by production.⁶

Marx's concept of production in general clearly subsumed the elements of which production in all epochs must consist -- the labour of individual human beings on nature and society. Or, as Marx put it, "all production", regardless of the particular social and material forms it assumes in different historical epochs, "is appropriation of nature on the part of an individual within and through a specific form of society".⁷ Marx's initial formulation of the concept of production in general occurs in his early writings -- the German Ideology, the Theses on Feuerbach, and the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 -- with one of the best formulations of it in his pamphlet Wage Labour and Capital:

In the process of production, human beings work not only upon nature, but also upon one another. They produce only by working together in a specified manner and reciprocally exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations to one another, and only within these social connections and relations does their influence upon nature operate, i.e., does production take place.⁸

In this quote can be seen the qualities common to human production in every epoch: its simultaneously social and material character, the presence of both historical subjects (people) and objects (society and nature), as well as the centrality of human labour (the processes of objectification and subjectification).

Diagram 1 represents the five moments which comprise Marx's abstraction "production in general": the material-physical world, the social world, the physical and the social aspects of the human being, all dialectically mediated by human labour. As a dialectical totality, the concept of production in general consists of a mediated unity of elements which interpenetrate and are internally related. The development of that totality is provided by the internal contradictions that arise between moments, and which impel men to act to transcend their circumstances (both material and social) in accordance with their human needs and powers (again both material-physical and social in character).

For Marx, human needs included -- minimally -- a need for self-preservation, for determination of social position, and a need for free playful self-representation. The creation, expansion and fulfillment of these material and social needs is the result of man's self-creation in the process of labouring to satisfy those needs by acting on and through both nature and society. If these needs are the motive

force of history, it is the processes of human objectification (i.e., material and social production) and subjectification (i.e., material and social consumption), in other words the labouring activity of human beings, that transforms the world in conformance with those needs.⁹ Hunt has described Marx's view of human production as follows:

human life is a social process in which man satisfies human needs and develops human powers through social activities which appropriate and transform nature. The relations between the individual and society and between the individual and nature are reciprocally mediated, that is, the relation between an individual and nature is mediated by that individual's relations in society, while most social relations are mediated by the mode of people's appropriation of nature.¹⁰

From this it should be evident that Marx's concepts of the labour process (i.e., material objectification/subjectification), the social relations of production* (i.e., social objectification/subjectification) and human labour are transhistorical concepts tied to his notion of production in general. Put differently, every epoch of human history involves material and social

*A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY:

For Marx, the term "production" refers to both the processes of material objectification/subjectification and social objectification/subjectification as they occur in their simultaneity. The former, the material side of human production, Marx calls the labour process; however, the social side of human production -- what we could call "the socializing process" -- is not assigned any particular label in Marx's writings. Instead, Marx tends to use the term "social relations", or "social relations of production" to denote not only the socially real product of human labour (i.e., society) but the actual process of social objectification as well. For our purposes, the term social relations is used when referring to the process of social objectification, though occasionally the expression "social process" is used to emphasize that we are talking about the process of production rather than its social results.

To complicate matters even further, the term "labour process" is most often used by Marx to refer not simply to material objectification/subjectification, but to both the material and social aspects of human production as they actually interpenetrate when people engage in working activity. "Labour process" is used in both senses in this thesis, the meaning being evident from the context.

production through the human working activity of men within a material and societal context.

Marx made it abundantly clear that the moments of production in general have no existence independent of the specific forms they assume within real historical social formations; they are simply abstractions.¹¹ Marx's clear hostility to any type of metaphysical view of history is evident in the following:

These abstractions in themselves, divorced from real history, have no value whatsoever. They can only serve to facilitate the arrangement of historical material.... But they by no means afford a recipe or schema, as does philosophy, for neatly trimming the epochs of history. On the contrary, the difficulties begin only when one sets about the examination and arrangement of the material....¹²

Thus, Marx's conception of "real positive science" began with the abstract concepts of production in general, "abstractions which are derived from the observation of the historical development of man",¹³ but which have no specific historical content. The materialist conception of history includes both these transhistorical categories of production in general, and the more specifically historical categories which arise in the investigation of concrete human history. As Sayer elaborates, citing Marx,

It follows that ... "the so-called general pre-conditions of all production are nothing more than ... abstract moments with which no real historical stage of production can be grasped." Historical particulars cannot be apprehended in

transhistorical generalities. And further, Marx asserts, what can validly be asserted of production in general is extremely limited: "this reduces itself in fact to a very few simple characteristics, which are hammered out into flat tautologies".¹⁴

The relation between Marx's transhistorical categories, and the historical categories he develops in the investigation of a specific mode of production (e.g., the commodity, in the case of his analysis of the capitalist mode of production), is a complex one, requiring a thorough understanding of both his method of investigation and his method of presentation. These problems go well beyond the scope of this thesis, but an important discussion of them can be found in Derek Sayer's book Marx's Method.¹⁵ Suffice it to say, following Sayer's argument, it is impossible either to derive historical categories from transhistorical ones, or to form theories of various modes of production by an a priori permutation of the concepts of production in general (as Stalinism attempts to). Nevertheless, the transhistorical categories of production in general do play an important part in the formation of Marx's historical categories.

Transhistorical categories, and the analysis of production in general in which they are grounded, are basic to the identification of the social forms which constitute Marx's explananda. For it is only this analysis which enables him first to isolate, in any given empirical context, some set of phenomena as pertaining to production at all, and second, to distinguish, within these phenomena, attributes which pertain to production as such from attributes which stem from particular relations of the mode of production of which these

phenomena are manifestations ... without this double identification, Marx's critique could not get off the ground at all.... In any given case, relevant phenomena ... are those which prima facie display those attributes grasped by Marx's trans-historical categories. The commodity, for instance, has a prima facie relevance to the analysis of the modes of production in which it is found because it is visibly the product of a labour process. ... The same goes for all phenomena, in any particular instance, which appear to exhibit qualities that make them elements of the labour process or the social relations necessary to its performance. Thus Marx identifies productive phenomena by virtue of their similarities with their counterparts elsewhere, on the basis of a prior set of claims about the necessary conditions of any production whatsoever. Having done that, he then abstracts from just these similarities. ... Henceforth Marx's interest lies precisely in such attributes as the phenomena he has identified display as are not explained by this analysis or given in its transhistorical categories. These latter attributes, which define the phenomena as distinctive social forms, have yet to be accounted for, and provide the specific starting point for his critique.¹⁶

That Sayer is correct to emphasize Marx's distinction between the transhistorical categories of production in general, and the historical categories specific to different modes of production, is evident in Marx's Grundrisse:

this general category (i.e., his category of production in general - BM), this common element sifted out by comparison, is itself segmented many times over and splits into different determinations. Some determinations belong to all epochs, others to only a few.... No production will be thinkable without them; however, even though the most developed ... (epochs of production -BM) have laws and characteristics in common with the least developed, nevertheless, just those things which determine their development, i.e., the elements which are not general and common, must be separated out from the determinations valid for production as such, so that in their unity -- which arises already from the identity of the subject, humanity, and of the object, nature -- their essential difference is not forgotten.¹⁷

The historically specific social and material forms (i.e., the forms of the social relations as well as the forms of the labour process) which Marx investigates, for example with his analysis in Capital, have to be "peeled out" from the features of production in general, and examined for the qualities they possess not shared by production in other epochs.¹⁸ Sayer elaborates, pointing out that if the social form to be explained is historically specific, then the explanation must be likewise (note that his comment also applies to forms of the labour process):

if the attributes which define social forms cannot be accounted for with reference to the conditions common to all productive activity, then their explanation can lie only in conditions specific to the mode or modes of production in which they occur. The twofold conclusion follows: to give an adequate explanation of social forms is necessarily to grasp them historically, while to grasp ... (those -BM) phenomena historically is necessarily to apprehend them in their specific social forms. If, then, social forms are the object of Marx's enquiry, their analysis must take the form of an excavation of the specifically historical conditions and relations which explain them.¹⁹

This most basic feature of Marx's materialist conception of history is precisely what Stalin violates. His formulation of historical materialism is as an abstract and transhistorical set of laws of motion which can be applied immediately to the 'facts' of history. -- laws of the historical process in general.²⁰ In other words, Stalin (and those who subscribe to his version of Marxism) approaches the rich

fabric of history with a pre-established series of laws, rather than discovering the laws of motion peculiar to each epoch of human history through an empirical investigation informed by an understanding of the features of all human history. Stalin's metaphysical laws of history extinguish all semblance of real historical development in the trans-historical; they are derived from the "laws of motion" of all matter, as revealed in the science of "Dialectical Materialism". As Stalin explained in his essay "Dialectical and Historical Materialism,"

Historical materialism is the extension of the principles of dialectical materialism to the study of social life, an application of the principles of dialectical materialism ... to the study of society and history.²¹

Stalin divided the theory of dialectical materialism into its method, dialectics, and its interpretation of the phenomena of nature, which was philosophically materialist. Marxist philosophical materialism was defined to include what one author has called a "cosmological postulate of universal orderliness and conformity to law",²² the belief that the world consists of "different forms of matter in motion" which develop in accordance with a few laws. Despite having labelled dialectics as "a method", Stalin described the principle features of dialectics as the character of the laws of motion of all matter. He identified four such laws of motion: first, that the phenomena of nature form an organically

connected whole; second, that those phenomena of nature are in a constant state of change and development; third, that they undergo quantitative changes leading to qualitative changes in an inherently progressive direction; and fourth, that they are internally contradictory.²³ A further, and very much related aspect of Stalin's dialectical materialist outlook is the idea that matter, and its laws of motion are

an objective reality existing outside and independent of our mind; that matter is primary, since it is the source of sensations, ideas, mind, and that mind is secondary, derivative, since it is a reflection of matter....²⁴

There are numerous problems with Stalin's essay which render it incompatible with Marx's work, not the least of which is his initial effort to begin with matter considered independently of man. Marx utterly rejected such a view, hence his comment that "nature, taken abstractly, for itself, rigidly separated from man, is nothing for man".²⁵ Arguing against Feuerbach in the German Ideology, Marx formulated the same point in greater detail:

(Feuerbach) ... does not see that the sensuous world around him is not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society....²⁶

And further on he adds,

So much is this activity, this unceasing labour and creation, this production, the foundation of the whole sensuous world as it now exists that, were it interrupted for a whole year, Feuerbach would not only find an enormous change

in the natural world, but would very soon find that the whole world of men and his own perceptive faculty, nay his own existence, were missing. Of course, in all of this the priority of external nature remains unassailed ... (but) for that matter, nature, the nature that preceded human history, is not by any means the nature in which Feuerbach lives, it is nature which no longer exists anywhere (except perhaps on a few Australian coral islands of recent origin....²⁷

In his definitive study The Concept of Nature in Marx, Alfred Schmidt explains that Marx's unwillingness to conceive of nature in abstraction from man eliminates the possibility of using an abstract notion of material reality to provide a set of metaphysical principles for explaining history.²⁸

When he considers material nature, just as when he considers society, Marx's theory admits of "no autonomous substance such as could exist independently of its concrete determinations".

It is the socio-historical character of Marx's concept of nature which distinguishes it from the outset. Marx ... saw nature from the beginning in relation to human activity all other statements about nature, whether of a speculative, epistemological, or scientific kind, already presuppose social practice ... the human life process....²⁹

The implications of Marx's concept of nature for Stalin's dialectical materialism are spelled out by Schmidt:

The dialectical element of Marxist materialism does not consist in the denial that matter has its own laws and its own movement (or motion), but in the understanding that matter's laws of motion can only be recognized and appropriately applied by men through the agency of mediating practice. The dialectical movement between man and nature which takes place in production does not exclude the operation of laws of nature ...

(that) exist independently of and outside the consciousness and will of men. (Marx -BM) ... also holds to this tenet, but with the following supplement: men can only become certain of the operation of the laws of nature through the forms provided by their labour processes.³⁰

Besides establishing that Stalin differed from Marx in considering nature in abstraction from man, the above discussion also illustrates the meaning of his first dialectical law of motion of all matter. Stalin believed that the phenomena of nature -- man being, of course, a natural being -- form an organically connected whole. His conception of the totality formed by man and nature is not dialectical -- men existing as natural beings, and nature being the product of the ever recurrent labour of men. Because Stalin's totality is an undialectical one, in which the two elements, man and nature, are unmediated (by human labour) and do not interpenetrate, his organic totality combines the two by making the one (nature) predominate over the other (man) where the two are considered to be only externally related. This means that Stalin also violates his fourth 'law of motion of matter', namely the internally contradictory nature of all matter.

This discussion could be extended at great length, in order to establish that Stalin's dualistic conception of man and nature, and his "dialectical" laws of motion of matter bear no resemblance whatsoever to Marx's understanding of dialectics. Instead, I will make one additional point, and then direct the reader to a number of sources for further discussion.³¹

Colletti, among others, has identified the simultaneously teleological and causal quality of human labour as it changes the objective world (both nature and society) and transforms the labourer.³² It is this quality of human labour as transformative which makes human history dialectical, and which formed the basis for Marx's transformation of Hegel's dialectic. What Stalin -- with his acceptance of a crude materialism -- would never appreciate, was the importance of labour and history in Hegel's philosophy. While Marx agreed with Feuerbach's efforts to root man in nature, and make consciousness dependent upon sense experience, he rejected Feuerbach's view of man and nature as forming an unmediated unity.³³ Thus, in the Theses On Feuerbach, Marx stressed the importance of the active side of man's relationship to nature as the basis of history:

The chief defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that things, reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was set forth abstractly by idealism -- which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach ... does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary", of "practical-critical" activity.³⁴

And even earlier, Marx had written

The outstanding achievement of Hegel's Phenomenology ... is first, that Hegel grasps the self creation of man as a process, objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and transcendence of this alienation, and that he, therefore, grasps the nature of labour and conceives objective man ... as the result of his own labour.³⁵

For Marx, the dialectic necessarily included the subjective factor of consciousness, intention, and teleology. In that respect, Stalin's summary of the dialectical laws of motion of all matter is deficient and inherently so. Nature, conceived in abstraction from man, has no dialectically self-transformative character. Following Engels, Stalin simply inverted Hegel's metaphysical view in which the teleological quality of consciousness reigned supreme, to one in which the causal quality of matter was the explanatory principle. In this manner, Stalin's view of history was thoroughly undialectical, being a history without the human subject as the driving force. Instead, he had an objectivistic view of history which reduced man to a passive object of nature's laws.

In his book The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism, Jordan persuasively argues that the transhistorical and socio-cosmic quality of Stalin's dialectical materialism was not viewed by him as a weakness, because it enabled him to ultimately 'demonstrate' the superiority of his own 'cosmically backed' theories.

Stalin's dialectical materialism is a socio-cosmic conception. Its main function is to provide the premises from which historical materialism ... can allegedly be deduced. Historical materialism, established as a particular case of universal regularity inherent in the nature of the universe, in turn justifies definite policies of the party and personal decisions of its leaders 'as practical deductions' derived from the laws of development of society.³⁶

(In fact, as we shall see, Stalin's abstract laws of motion of matter are sufficiently vacuous that when wielded by the

supreme authority himself, they could be used to justify virtually any assessment of reality necessary for pragmatic reasons.)

Stalin's cosmological view, in which the abstract laws of motion of all history are elaborated without recourse to the actual process of human development, contravenes Marx's commitment to empirical investigation and historical specificity. In the Grundrisse Marx demonstrated his opposition to metaphysical views of history when he reminded himself that a point "not to be forgotten" was that the dialectic of the forces and relations of production was one "whose boundaries are to be determined".³⁷ That could only be heresy for Stalin and his followers. Banajii has commented on the metaphysical quality of Stalin's version of historical materialism, pointing out that it reduces historical investigation to the verification of the previously established metaphysical laws:

Stalinism uprooted not only the proletarian orientations of Marxism, but its scientific foundations as well. For the dialectic as the principle of rigorous scientific investigation of historical processes ... Stalinism substituted the "dialectic" as a cosmological principle prior to, and independent of science. For the materialist conception of history is substituted a theory of history "in general", converting historical epochs into a logical succession of inflexible social categories. Finally, this rubber stamp conception of history deja constituée, open therefore only to the procedures of verification. This lifeless bureaucratic conception ... produced a history emptied of any specifically historical content....³⁸

Stalin's laws of motion of history -- which consist of abstract formulae employing the concepts 'forces of production', 'relations of production' and 'superstructure' -- exclude the subjective features of Marx's production in general (i.e., man as the agent of history) as well as the role of human labour. When history is thus reduced to an objective-logical process of the forces and relations of production, the historian has great difficulty in dealing with many of the historical phenomena which were so vital to Marx's work. History gets reduced to an ex post facto justification of the most recently announced understanding of the operation of the laws of the cosmos, as established by the supreme scientific authority (usually Stalin or his designated theoreticians).

That Marx opposed efforts to construct a general and metaphysical theory of history is evident from a letter he wrote in 1877. Objecting to a critic's characterization of his work, Marx repudiated any attempt at "transforming my historical sketch of the genesis of Capitalism in Eastern Europe (as contained in volume I of Capital -BM) into an historico-philosophical theory of the general path of development prescribed by fate to all nations". Further, he added,

events strikingly analogous but taking place in different historical surroundings led to totally different results. By studying each of these forms of evolution separately and then comparing them one can easily find the clue to this phenomenon, but one will never arrive there by using as one's

master key a general historico-philosophical theory the supreme virtue of which consists in being supra-historical.³⁹

Thus, Marx's Capital cannot be understood as an application of general laws of motion of all history to the phenomena of the capitalist mode of production. Rather, starting with the real premises of human history, the features essential to any human production, Marx investigated the capitalist mode of production in an effort to establish the "laws of motion" and the categories appropriate to that specific epoch of human history. To analyze capitalism involved more than simply applying formulae like 'the contradiction between the forces and relations of production'. It meant producing concepts on the same level of historical concreteness as the concepts of "value", "capital" and "commodity fetishism".⁴⁰ Gamble and Walton have made a similar point:

Marx's own theory has two levels -- his discussion of the real premises of human history, of what distinguishes man from animals, and his analysis of different modes of production. There are no dialectical laws as such, only particular laws or tendencies that belong to particular modes of production. Hence it is misleading to refer to Marx's theory as a philosophy of history.... the 'objective meaning' he discerns in history is not a determined sequence of stages, nor the temporal unfolding of some historical essence. Rather it is an understanding of the limits and possibilities that are inherent in human activity itself....⁴¹

Marx's investigation of the general determinations of human production occupied him throughout his earliest writings, like the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, the

German Ideology, and the Thesis on Feuerbach. Having established the essential premises of the materialist conception of history during those years, his subsequent work focused on the analysis of the capitalist mode of production in Capital and the Grundrisse, and the investigation of concrete social formations in writings like The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon.

The "real premises" which form Marx's basic abstraction of production, in general, are a guide to historical research and the reconstruction of the nature and dynamics of real historical modes of production. As such, the elements of the concept of production in general have no content attributable to the nature of society in any specific epoch. Nowhere does Marx make the mistake of substituting an abstractly deduced model of a specific historical period in place of careful empirical research to establish the actual nature of a mode of production. Marx was adamant: the premises of production in general were indeed essential, but there could be no substitute for the concrete empirical work necessary to writing history. In the German Ideology, he wrote:

The fact is ... that definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into definite social and political relations. Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production.⁴²

Marx had no intention of investing his "real premises" of human history with a specific content and then imposing it on history as the eternal explanatory principle. It is in the historical work of Stalinists that we detect what Marx called a tendency "to confound or extinguish all historical differences under general humanity".⁴³

Stalin's version of the materialist conception of history is guilty of collapsing the distinction between trans-historical and historical categories. Unlike Marx, who expended considerable effort to reformulate the concepts of his predecessors into unambiguously historical and trans-historical categories, (e.g., in the value theory of labour, with value and use value) Stalin operates virtually without historical categories. Stalinist theory errs by subsuming the

historical explananda under transhistorical explananda: otherwise put, the historical attributes which differentiate ... phenomena as distinctive social forms are 'explained' by theses logically capable only of explaining characteristics of the transhistorical classes to which these phenomena belong. Examples include explanations of the value form by the natural properties of commodities, as with the Mercantilists....⁴⁴

The phenomenon of commodity fetishism -- which is an object of Marx's attention in his analysis of the capitalist mode of production -- is rooted in the systematic inversion of the historical and the transhistorical. Several quotes from Capital illustrate that commodity fetishism is an example of this type of theoretical error:

The fetishism peculiar to the capitalist mode of production from which it arises ... consists in regarding economic categories such as being a commodity or productive labour, as qualities inherent in the material incarnations of these formal determinations or categories.⁴⁵

(This) fetishism ... transforms the social, economic character that things are stamped with in the process of social production into a natural character arising from the material nature of these things.⁴⁶

Such an inversion makes, for example, the peculiar social character of value as a capitalist social relation appear to be the product of the material side of human labour, the production of use values (which is a feature of human production across epochs). Sayer draws the appropriate conclusion:

to view the social properties things acquire under definite social regimes as inherent in their natural forms is to obscure the essential relations that in fact constitute their conditions. It is to desocialize the world. But it is also to do something else. It is ... to universalize the historical, to predicate of transhistorical classes of phenomena qualities which are in fact specific to individual and historical members of those classes (and indeed define them as such). Fetishism, in short, accomplishes a simultaneous double inversion of natural and social, universal and historical.... The net effect ... is to estrange human products (both material and social -BM) from their makers and deny their constructed character.⁴⁷

The systematic inversion of the transhistorical and the historical is what lies at the heart of Stalin's fetishized conception of human production. With natural and cosmic laws as the agent of history, Stalin and his followers have systematically perverted Marx's conception of human production as they key to historical development. By substituting abstract

and transhistorical laws for concrete human action the Stalinist version of historical materialism eliminates the need for serious empirical investigation. More importantly, Stalin's Marxism reduces human production to an exclusively material and transhistorical process, rendering social relations derivative and transhistorical in character. As we will see, the metaphysical theory of history to which Stalinism adheres is also technicist in character -- making all social relations explainable by reference to a transhistorical and exclusively material-technical process of production of things. In this fashion, social relations ultimately assume an eternal character; the class relations of capitalism are eternalized, the possibility of the successful struggle of the working class to overcome class exploitation and domination disappears, and the state capitalist regime of Stalin is then exalted as the "socialism" of Marx. All of this is sketched out below.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER III

1. Some of the disastrous implications of Engel's efforts to give Marxism a new philosophical foundation can be found in "On Engels' Metaphysical Dialectics: A Foundation of Orthodox 'Marxism'," by Jack Mendelson, Dialectical Anthropology, Volume 4, 1979; "Engels and the Genesis of Marxism", by Gareth Stedman Jones, New Left Review #106; "Dialectics of Nature or Dialectics of Practice?" by Angus Taylor, Dialectical Anthropology, Vol. 4, 1979, and throughout Alfred Schmidt's book The Concept of Nature in Marx, New Left Books, 1971.
2. See Helmut Fleischer's Marxism and History, Allen Lane the Penguin Press, 1973.
3. The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis, by Norman Penner, Prentice-Hall, 1977, p. 83.
4. Grundrisse, by Karl Marx, Vintage Books, 1973, pp. 85-108.
5. See Marx's Method: Ideology, Science and Critique in Capital, by Derek Sayer, the Harvester Press, 1979, pp. 31-3, 77-80, and 108-113.
6. The German Ideology, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Progress Publishers, 1976, pp. 36-7.
7. Grundrisse, op. cit., p. 87.
8. From Wage Labour and Capital, by Karl Marx, International Publishers, 1933, p. 28.
9. This conception of dialectics is distilled primarily from the work of Karel Kosik, Dialectics of the Concrete, D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1976, Joachim Israel, The Language of Dialectics and the Dialectics of Language, Munksgaard, Humanities Press, 1979, and from The Ontology of Social Being, sections 1 on Hegel, 2 on Marx, and 3 on Labour by George Lukacs, published by Merlin Press in 1978 (volumes 1 and 2) and 1980 (volume 3). Also important is the work of Bertell Ollman, especially "In Defence of Internal Relations", in Radical Philosophy #13, Spring 1976, "Marxism and Political Science: Prolegomenon to a Debate on Marx's Method" in his Social and Sexual Revolution: Essays on Marx and Reich, Black Rose Press, 1978, and Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in a Capitalist Society, Cambridge University Press, 1971.

10. See "Marx's theory of Property and Alienation", by E.K. Hunt, in Theories of Property, ed. by A. Parel and T. Flanagan, Wilfred Laurier Press, p. 283.
11. See Sayer, Marx's Method ..., op. cit., p. 78.
12. German Ideology, op. cit., p. 43.
13. ibid.
14. See Sayer, op. cit., p. 79. The internal quotes are from Marx's Grundrisse, pp. 86 and 99.
15. See Sayer, beginning p. 88.
16. ibid., p. 111.
17. Grundrisse, p. 85.
18. Sayer, op. cit. pp. 108-9.
19. ibid.
20. See "Modes of Production in a Materialist Conception of History", Jairus Banaji, in Capital and Class, #3, 1977.
21. Stalin's essay "Dialectical and Historical Materialism" is contained in the volume History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), International Publishers, 1939, p. 105.
22. See The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism, by Zibignew A. Jordan, Macmillan, 1967, p. 111.
23. Stalin, op. cit., pp. 106-109.
24. ibid., p. 112.
25. See The Concept of Nature in Marx, by Alfred Schmidt,, New Left Books, 1971, p. 30.
26. German Ideology, op. cit., p. 45.
27. ibid., p. 46.
28. Schmidt, op. cit., pp. 34-5.
29. ibid., pp. 15-16.
30. ibid., pp. 98-9.

31. See the sources in footnote #20 above.
32. See "The Marxism of the Second International", by Lucio Colletti, in Telos #8, 1971, p. 85. Also see Marx's Social Ontology, by Carol Gould, MIT Press, 1980.
33. See an unpublished paper by David McNally, Karl Marx and the Critique of Civil Society, 1978, p. 54.
34. German Ideology, p. 618.
35. Cited in McNally's Karl Marx ..., p. 53.
36. Jordan, op. cit., p. 292.
37. Grundrisse, p. 109.
38. See Banaji, op. cit., p. 3.
39. Cited in Socialist Construction and Marxist Theory, by Phillip Corrigan, Harvie Ramsay, and Derak Sayer, Macmillan, pp. 18-19.
40. Banaji, op. cit., p. 3.
41. See From Alienation to Surplus Value, by Paul Walton and Andrew Gamble, p. 72.
42. German Ideology, p. 41.
43. Grundrisse, p. 87.
44. Sayer, Marx's Method, op. cit., pp. 147-8.
45. *ibid.*
46. See Capital, Vol. I, by Karl Marx, Vintage Books, 1976, p. 1046.

CHAPTER IV

THE LABOUR PROCESS, AND THE UNITY OF THE
MATERIAL AND SOCIAL SIDES OF PRODUCTION

We have already seen that Stalin's version of historical materialism denies the role of human labour in the historical process, while operating with a theory premised upon the subordination and derivation of mind from matter. These features of his theories of dialectical and historical materialism are important violations of both Marx's method and his concept of production in general. They are also indicators of another way in which Stalin's theory diverges from that of Marx. It mechanically separates the material and social sides of human production, reducing the content of each while making the latter simply an effect of the former.

Marx's analysis of production in general views the material and social aspects of human reality as a dialectical unity of interpenetrating moments. Thus, man's relation to nature is never exclusively a technical matter, any more than his relation to society is a purely social one. No labour process ever occurs, except through the existing social relations, and no social relations can exist without having as their object the material reproduction of human life. Production is an irreducibly social as it is material. As Marx put it, "the restricted relation of man to nature determines their restricted relation to one another, and their restricted relation

7

to one another determines man's relation to nature".

Similarly, he wrote that the "particular relation of man to nature is determined by the form of society and vice versa".¹

While the labour process (i.e., the process of material objectification/subjectification and the social process of production (i.e., the process of social objectification/subjectification) can be distinguished analytically, Marx insisted that in reality they form a dialectical totality. He illustrates the point in Capital, when he argues that the capitalist labour process and the valorization process (i.e., the process of producing specifically capitalist social relations) are distinguishable only in the abstract.

If we consider the production process from two different points of view 1) as labour process, 2) as value expansion process, then it is implied that it is only a single, indivisible labour process. It is not executed twice, one time in order to create a useful product, a use value ... and another time to create surplus value, to expand value.²

Despite the inseparability of the material and the social character of production, neither is reducible to the other. If their unity is misconstrued as an identity, then one becomes derivative of the other. Derive social reality from the labour process and you get the crude materialism Marx sought to avoid. Reverse the derivation so the labour process is a product of social relations, and you have the idealism which he also rejected.³ To paraphrase Jakubowski's conclusion in a discussion of the dialectical unity of thought and being,

Marx differed from both idealism and from abstract, metaphysical materialism. ... he also represented their synthesis. But in making the synthesis he avoided the one sidedness of each of them and brought consciousness (for our purposes, read social relations -BM) and being (read the labour process -BM) into a real unity, that of living man. ... Being determines thought, but it is human being, not some kind of abstractly conceived matter. As Marx wrote in the German Ideology, "Consciousness can never be anything but conscious being, and the being of man is his real life process." ... In his own words, "we see here how consistent naturalism or humanism (the way Marx described his own philosophical position -BM) distinguishes itself from both idealism and from materialism, constituting at the same time the unifying truth of both".⁴

In other words, the labour process and social process interpenetrate; the labour process is always simultaneously a social process that involves the co-operation of conscious and inter-relating social beings, just as social relations are always relations between natural beings who depend upon material production for their continued existence and welfare.

Marx persistently refused to fragment the unity and internal relation between the social forms which the relations of production adopt, and the material forms that characterize the labour process in any mode of production. Virtually all of his work after the German Ideology was devoted to explaining why the capitalist process of production assumed the specific social forms which it did. However, a subsidiary theme -- manifest most clearly in Results of the Immediate Process of Production -- dealt with the specifically capitalist forms of the labour process as shaped by the class struggle and the

accumulation of capital.

The Stalinist tradition of Marxism is traditionally able to distinguish the material and social sides of human production, but rather than appreciating their dialectical unity, it separates them into rigid and mutually exclusive phenomena that are only externally related. In Stalin's work, material reality is contemplated in isolation from social reality and vice versa. As a consequence, the effort to recombine the two results in their simple mechanical addition and the subordination and derivation of one from the other. Having been rigidly divided without the dialectical mediation of human labour, the material and the social can only be recombined such that the driving force of history stems from one or the other (resulting in either a technological determinist or an idealist account of history), or from both, in an undialectical way (resulting in a pluralist and eclectic account of history). Either way, the dialectic mediation of human labour as the simultaneously material and social force which drives human history disappears. Later, I will explore how these difficulties lead the Stalinist tradition to adopt impoverished and reductionist concepts of the labour process and forces of production, the social process and relations of production, and a conception of history that combines the worst aspects of idealism and technological determinism. But it is necessary to illustrate the dualism at the heart of

Stalin's conception of production, before investigating the content he attributes to his major concepts.

As he concludes his discussion of the concepts 'productive forces' and 'relations of production' in his "dialectical and historical materialism", Stalin writes:

the mode of production embraces both the productive forces of society and men's relations of production, and is thus the embodiment of their unity in the process of production of material values.⁵

What is significant here, of course, is that the process of production is seen as an exclusively material process. It is "material values" that are produced, not material and social reality simultaneously. Hence the "unity" between the productive forces and the social relations cannot be a dialectical one. Rather, it is a mechanical unity, in which a social dimension is added on to an essentially material process of production. This interpretation of Stalin's historical materialism is substantiated by his own brief description of the concepts 'productive forces' and 'relations of production':

While the state of the productive forces furnishes an answer to the question -- with what instruments do men produce the material values they need? -- the state of the relations of production furnishes the answers to another question -- who owns the means of production ... who commands the means of production....⁶

Here the content of these concepts is made explicit. The labour process -- what Stalin mistakenly refers to as the 'productive forces' (a concept discussed below) -- refers to the process of

production as executed by material technical factors of production; tools, raw materials and human muscle and bone. Social relations are reduced to property rights in the material factors of production, making it clear that social reality is the product of some process other than the exclusively material labour process Stalin describes.

The gulf between the labour process and social relations in Stalin's theory violates the dialectical unity of the two in Marx's concept of production in general. To fully appreciate how a dualistic conception of human production perverts Marxist theory, we need to explore the Marxist and Stalinist understanding of these concepts in greater detail. We begin with Marx's concept of the labour process.

For Marx, the labour process is defined, as might be expected from the previous discussion, as a process of material objectification/subjectification (or material production/consumption) involving man, labouring activity and nature. Notice that the following description of the labour process and its elements clearly mark it as a specifically human process (i.e.; it interpenetrates with the existing social relations, while man is not reduced to a material factor of production):

Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of

nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power. ... We presuppose labour in a form in which it is an exclusively human characteristic. ... At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realizes his own purpose in those materials.... The simple elements of the labour process are (1) purposeful activity, that is work itself, (2) the object on which that work is performed, and (3) the instruments of that work.⁷

Every moment of this process of material objectification/subjectification -- subject, object and mediating labour -- is stamped as simultaneously material and social in character. The subject is a bundle of social intentions and needs as well as physical energy transmitted through arms and legs; the object is not merely nature, but tools (what Marx once referred to as "humanized nature") used in application to "the sensuous world" which is "not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining over the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society".⁸

The labour process represents the material side of Marx's concept of production in general, and is therefore a transhistorical category.

The labour process, as we have just presented it in its simple and abstract elements, is purposeful activity aimed at the production of

use values. It is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of man. It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the everlasting nature imposed condition of all human existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live.⁹

Or as Marx puts it elsewhere

The process of labour is nothing but work itself, viewed at the moment of its creative activity. Hence the universal features of the labour process are independent of every specific social development.¹⁰

However, the labour process is not simply a transhistorical category, for it adopts different forms in each historical epoch. For Marx, the character of a specific mode of production is evident from the form of the labour process peculiar to it.

Hence, he could write:

It is not what is made but how, and by what instruments ... that distinguishes different economic epochs. Instruments of labour not only supply a standard of the degree of development which human labour has attained, but they also indicate the social relations within which men work. ... Relics of bygone instruments of labour possess the same importance for the investigation of extinct economic functions of society as do fossil bones for the determination of extinct species of animals.

Marx's most detailed treatment of a specific labour process occurs in the context of his analysis of the capitalist mode of production. His discussion of nature of the formal and real subsumption of labour under capital is clearly a discussion of the way in which capitalist social relations transform the labour process, giving it a form peculiar only

to capitalism. Precisely because the labour process and the relations of production interpenetrate and constitute a dialectical totality, it is impossible to conceive of the labour process as identical across all modes of production, and somehow outside history. Marx makes this clear in

Theories of Surplus Value:

Man himself is the basis of his material production, as of any other production that he carries on. All circumstances, therefore, which affect man, the subject of production, more or less modify all his functions and activities, and therefore too his functions and activities as the creator of human wealth.... In this respect it can in fact be shown that all human relations and functions, however and in whatever form they may appear, influence material production and have a more or less decisive influence upon it.¹²

Yet, Stalin does posit a labour process which is identical across all history. To begin with, Stalin never uses the expression "labour process", speaking instead about "productive forces". (I will examine later the real meaning of the concept 'productive forces'. For the moment however, I am concerned only with Stalin's conception of the process of material objectification, regardless of what he calls it.) After asking rhetorically,

what, from the viewpoint of historical materialism, is ... the chief force in the complex of conditions of material life of society which determines the physiognomy of society, the character of the social system, the development of society from one system to another?¹³

Stalin replies,

This force ... is the method of procuring the means of life necessary for human existence, the mode of production of material values -- food, clothing, footwear, houses, fuel, instruments of production, etc. -- which are indispensable for the life of development of society.¹⁴

And later, he writes

The instruments of production wherewith material values are produced, the people who operate the instruments of production and carry on the production of material values thanks to a certain production experience and labour skill -- all these elements jointly constitute the productive forces of society.¹⁵

So the labour process consists of the instruments of production and human beings considered exclusively in terms of their material productivity. In other words, the labour process in Stalin's writings is reduced to a process of the production of "material values" by material factors of production (considered purely as a matter of material inputs and outputs). Such a view makes it difficult to conceive of the class struggle as something which is rooted in the production and reproduction of men's lives. Social relations are banished to another, separate and exclusively social sphere of reality.

This is a view of the labour process as an exclusively transhistorical category. For Stalin it has an external character as a process of material production by 'things' which have no social side to them. Because material production and social relations are not internally related, the labour process is seen as having the same form throughout all human history, while social relations change forms.

That is one of the reasons Stalinists are incapable of analysing the domination of machinery over the working class under capitalism. Because they consider human beings in the capitalist labour process as simply material things (as we shall see, exploitation is thought to occur outside the labour process) that domination is seen as natural and eternal -- a function of the character of production across history.

To the extent that men make history in Stalinist theory, it is only as completely non-social and indeed inhuman material factors of production -- literally as bundles of muscle and bone capable of expending physical energy. Even then, they are seen as acting out a plan whose parts have been written by the cosmos.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER IV

1. See The German Ideology, By Marx and Engels, Progress Publishers, 1976, p. 50.
2. Capital, Vol. I, Vintage Books, 1977, p. 991.
3. This discussion parallels that in Franz Jakubowski's Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism, Allison and Busby, 1976, pp. 16-17, and in Lukacs' Ontology of Social Being: Marx, pp. 6-7, op. cit.
4. Jakubowski, pp. 23-4 and 27.
5. See Stalin's "Dialectical and Historical Materialism," in History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), International Publishers, 1939, p. 120.
6. ibid., p. 123.
7. Capital, Vol. I, pp. 283-4.
8. German Ideology, p. 45.
9. Capital, Vol. I, p. 290.
10. ibid., p. 998.
11. ibid., p. 286.
12. From Theories of Surplus Value, by Karl Marx, cited in Socialist Construction and Marxist Theory, by Phillip Corrigan, Harvie Ramsay and Derek Sayer, Macmillan, 1978, p. 4.
13. Stalin, pp. 118-9.
14. ibid.

CHAPTER V

THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION,
PROPERTY AND TECHNICISM

The "social relations of production" is a concept which Stalinist Marxism revises on several counts: eliminating human individuals as the agent of history, employing the base/superstructure schema, and -- as a consequence -- misconceiving Marx's concepts of the state, property and social class.

The social relations which Marx discussed as part of his concept of production in general are premised on the dialectical unity of individual and society through human labour (social objectification and subjectification). Because Stalinist Marxism is an objectivist theory in which a non-social but material process of production and property relations are the two basic elements, it is crucial to emphasize that in Marx it is individuals in their social and material relations that form the basic unit of investigation. Marx repeatedly emphasized the importance of not positing the connection between the individual and society as a dualistic one:

It is above all necessary to avoid postulating 'society' once again as an abstraction confronting the individual. The individual is the social being. The manifestation of his life .. is, therefore, a manifestation and affirmation of social life.

A dualism between the individual and society leads to a reification of the latter as the humanly constructed character of society disappears. Marx is careful not to collapse the distinction between society -- which is constantly being reproduced by human objectification -- and the individual, even though they dialectically interpenetrate. For him, the connection between man and society is always mediated by the social objectification/subjectification of individual human beings.

In Marx's view not only the totality of social relations (society) originate in the activity of human beings, but also specific social relations -- like the state.

The social structure and the state are continually evolving out of the life process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or in other people's imagination, but as they really are; i.e., as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will.²

Thus the proper object of the materialist conception of history is the study of the practical activity of concretely existing individuals acting in the context of both objective (i.e., natural and social) and subjective situations (i.e., physical and social needs and intentions, etc.), such that they reproduce their material and social worlds while recreating themselves.

The individual plays a very much abbreviated role in Stalin's Marxism. As we saw, the individual is considered simply as a bones and muscle factor of production in Stalin's version of the labour process. In a similar way -- and we will see this more fully when we discuss Stalin's concept of property below -- Stalin's concept of the 'social' individual is exclusively as a property owner of a material factor of production who receives a revenue as a result of that ownership. However, both of these individuals -- the material individual who is composed of muscle and bones, and the social individual who is the property owner of a material individual -- get swallowed up into Stalin's objectivistic theory. The material individual disappears into the 'productive forces', while the social individual disappears into the 'social relations of production'. In Stalin's version of historical materialism it is not human individuals who make history, but contradictions between the forces and relations of production. The individual then becomes simply a pawn of these greater non-human forces, and an instrument through which they achieve their purposes.

Traditionally, Stalinist Marxism has divided social relations into two discrete, and only externally related, categories -- those of the economic base and those of the superstructure. In this account, the former are relations of property ownership in the means of production (i.e., the

material factors of production), while superstructural relations -- such as legal, political and ideological relations -- are derivative in character. Thus, only the social relations of the base are considered to be "social relations of production", with secondary superstructural relations being determined (in a mechanical sense) by the base. We will take up Stalin's use of the base/superstructure model later; for now, I want to investigate his concept of property relations, to demonstrate its reductionist character.

In "Dialectical and Historical Materialism", Stalin describes the social relations of production as follows:

Men carry on a struggle against nature and utilize nature for the production of material values not in isolation from each other, not as separate individuals, but in common, in groups, in societies. Production, therefore, is at all times and under all conditions social production. In the production of material values men enter into mutual relations of one kind or another within production, into relations of production of one kind or another. These may be relations of co-operation and mutual help between people who are free from exploitation; they may be relations of domination and subordination....⁴

As we saw above, Stalin also wrote that:

the state of the relations of production furnishes the answer to another question -- who owns the means of production...?⁵

In the first quote, Stalin appears to be arguing that social relations are actually about more than simply the ownership of material factors of production. Indeed, there are two contradictory conceptions of the social relations of production

in Stalin's essay. One sees social relations as relations of property in material factors of production, while the other admits that there are social relations involved in the labour process, but does not concede that men produce both "material values" and their social relations. In fact, however, the contradiction disappears, since Stalin only employs the second meaning of social relations twice. Most often he treats social relations exclusively in the first sense. For example, when he outlines the "five main types of relations of production ... known to history" he distinguishes between communal, slave, feudal, capitalist and socialist relations all on the basis of the different forms of property ownership. Thus, Stalin writes:

The basis of the relations of production under the primitive communal system is that the means of production are socially owned ... under the slave system ... that the slave owner owns the means of production; he also owns the worker in production -- the slave.... The basis of the relations of production under the feudal system is that the feudal lord owns the means of production and does not fully own the worker in production -- the serf.... Alongside of feudal ownership there exists individual ownership by the peasant and handicraftsman of his implements of production and his private enterprise based on his personal labour....⁶

In the case of each mode of production, Stalin describes the material character of the tools used in the labour process and the technical organization of material production, and then demonstrates that these 'productive forces' necessitate

certain social relations of property ownership in the material factors of production. Each of the above types of relations of production is defined by which material factors of production the direct producer and the exploiter each own. Social relations are excluded from the material labour process and restricted to an exclusively social sphere of relations between property owners. At no time does Stalin include any social relations entered into during the labour process as a consideration in differentiating between epochs of production. In this version of historical materialism, the social relations of production refer to the form of property ownership and nothing else.

This differs considerably from the concept of property we find in Marx. As Hunt has recently demonstrated, Marx uses the concept of 'property' as a transhistorical category which refers to those human relations to nature and other human beings which are the necessary precondition for life in all modes of production. In the Grundrisse, Marx wrote:

Property ... originally means no more than a human being's relation to his natural conditions of production as belonging to him, as his, as presupposed along with his whole being; relations to them as natural presuppositions of his self, which only form, so to speak, his extended body. He actually does not relate to his conditions of production, but rather has a double existence, both subjectively as he himself, and objectively in these natural non-organic conditions of his existence. The forms of these natural conditions

of production are double: (1) his existence as a member of a community... (and) (2) the relation to the land and the soil mediated by the community.... The relation to the earth (or any other material objects -BM) as property is always mediated through the occupation of the land and the soil ... by the tribe, the commune, (or some other social formation -BM) in some more or less naturally arisen or already developed form.⁷

Here, property is clearly a transhistorical concept that acts as a summary expression for the constellation of relations between all the elements of production in general. "Property" is not the activity of production (that is covered under Marx's concept of labour), but a way of describing the relation in which human beings stand to the material and social objects essential to human production.⁸ Marx does not restrict "property" to the social relation of ownership of a factor of material production, because he is talking about more than the relation of men to one another vis-à-vis material objects. "Property" also includes the relation of individuals to existing social relations, to what might be termed the "social" means of production.

The term "property" is ... essentially a synonym for the term "mode of production", referring to specific forms of co-operation in total social production. The property relation ... is therefore the form of that co-operation which is essential both technically and socially as form of relation to the objective conditions of production (both material and social -BM), co-operation which expresses the fact that "the human being is in the most literal sense Zoon politikhon". ... Relations of exploitation ... (are -BM) exploitative forms of co-operation.⁹

Thus, the concept property may include political phenomena, kinship, and other social relations. Much of this is evident in Marx's discussion of property in the Grundrisse.

All production is appropriation of nature on the part of an individual within and through a specific form of society. In this sense it is tautology to say that property (appropriation) is a precondition of production.... that there can be no production and hence no society where some form of property does not exist is a tautology.¹⁰

And,

Property, then, originally means -- in its Asiatic, Slavonic, ancient classical, German form -- the relation of the working (producing or self-reproducing) subject to the conditions of his production or reproduction as his own.¹¹

When these pre-capitalist forms of property refer to the relation of the direct producer and his objective material and social conditions of production, and when capitalist property refers to "the power of disposing of the labour power of others",¹² then the concept of property must be viewed as part of the totality of social relations of production. Marx made the same point in the Poverty of Philosophy:

In each historical epoch, property has developed different and under a set of entirely different social relations. Thus to define bourgeois property is nothing else than to give an exposition of all the social relations of bourgeois production. To try to give a definition of property as of an independent relation, a category apart, an abstract and eternal idea, can be nothing but an illusion of metaphysics or jurisprudence.¹³

Marx's argument is straight forward: although property is a transhistorical category, (i.e., a feature of his concept of "production in general"), it has a different form and a different content in each historical epoch. What constitutes 'property' in each mode of production is an empirical question that can only be resolved by a concrete examination of all the manifold forms which the social relations of production adopt. Marx clearly rejected any effort to treat the form of property in abstraction from the totality of social relations of production; in short, Marx's historical materialism is hostile to the Stalinist reduction of the social relations of production to property forms.

Simon Clarke has recently argued that the reduction of relations of production to forms of property has become so commonplace among Marxists, that the distinction has nearly been lost. Against the upholders of this view -- a legacy of the strength of the Stalinist tradition of Marxism -- Clarke counters that no mode of production can be identified either by its form of property (e.g., private ownership of the means of production and of labour power under capitalism) or by its related forms of surplus appropriation (e.g., profit under capitalism) and exploitation (e.g., wage labour under capitalism).

for historical materialism the relations of production, the particular antagonistic or non-antagonistic forms of social relations

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through which the relation between humanity and nature is mediated, are fundamental and cannot be reduced to any particular form in which they appear. On the contrary, the relations of production are multi-faceted relations which are expressed in, and reproduced through, a number of interdependent social relationships which are thereby to be understood as forms of the relations of production. The differentiation of these forms cannot be taken as given, nor deduced theoretically, but must be analysed concretely for each particular society. Thus while the relations of production cannot be reduced to any particular form in which they appear ... the political and ideological dimensions ... are just as central to, and cannot be dissociated from, the production and reproduction of exploitative class relations as is the narrowly economic dimension. ... The relations of production are, and can be no more than, the specific, historically located, differentiated social relationships in which people engage in their daily life. The concept itself expresses the Marxian hypothesis that these various social relationships have a unity that belies their apparent diversity.... In a class society... the social relations into which particular individuals enter cannot be understood solely as relations between individuals, but must be understood as relations between individuals who are members of social classes.¹⁴

Clarke's argument flows naturally from Marx's understanding of the social relations of production as a dialectical totality, and precludes the possibility of differentiating between historical epochs on the basis of just a few forms which the social relations adopt; it is the dialectical whole which is the proper starting point of analysis. That whole includes all the relations of a total process of social production, or as Marx put it: "the relations of production in their totality constitute what are

called the social relations, society, and specifically, a society at a definite stage of historical development".¹⁵

What the materialist conception of history must do, is examine "the specific and determinate historical process by which all social relations are subsumed under the dominant relation of production (e.g., the wage labour/capital relation under capitalism -BM) and so are determined as developed forms of that relations."¹⁶

The Stalinist conception of human production separates the materially defined labour process from social relations which are reduced to the nexus of social forms of surplus appropriation/exploitation derived from property ownership in the material factors of production. Because the labour process is understood exclusively as a trans-historical phenomenon (i.e., in Stalin's work, the process of production of material things never assumes a particular and unique historical form, there are only ever quantitative increases in the level of output) it is viewed as an eternal and essentially unchanging feature of all epochs of human production. Because Stalin believed his reductionist concept of the social relations of production could be mechanically derived from the material nature of the labour process, they too became external features of all modes of production throughout human history. Thus Stalin could periodise all of human history on the basis of a few, eternally decisive

expended surplus labour (now in the form of material goods embodying value) becomes the source of revenue for the exploiter and the exploited.²⁰ As Clarke points out, it was precisely this approach to the social relations of production which Marx was so anxious to discredit:

Marx goes beneath the level of appearances to ask not what is the basis of the property of the exploiter in the surplus product of the direct producer, but rather what is the basis of the production of the surplus product by the direct producer? This question leads us directly to relations of production and is prior to any questions of distribution and so of legal relations. Having established the basis in production of the expenditure of surplus labour, the question of the appropriation of that surplus labour is relatively trivial.²¹

Marx penetrates the surface appearances of capitalist society -- in which production appears to be the result of the activity of the three material 'factors of production', land, labour and capital -- to examine the essential nature of production. He shows that the "trinity formula" reifies social relations because it "compounds the historically determined social forms of production with the material aspects of the real labour process".²² It was clearly the technician view of human production which prompted Marx to write -- in the Chapter on the "Trinity Formula" in volume II of Capital -- that "all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided".²³ It also occasioned the following scathing criticism from him:

The so-called distribution relations ... correspond to and arise from historically determined specific social forms of the process of production and mutual relations entered into by men in the reproduction process of human life. The historical character of these distribution relations is the historical character of the production relations, of which they express merely one aspect.... The view which regards only distribution relations as historical, but not production relations, is, on the one hand, solely the view of the initial, but still handicapped, criticism of bourgeois economy. On the other hand, it rests on the confusion and identification of the process of social production with the simple labour process.... To the extent that the labour process is solely a labour process between man and nature, its simple elements remain common to all social forms of development. But each specific historical form of this process further develops its material foundations and social forms. Whenever a certain stage of maturity has been reached, the specific historical form is discarded and makes way for a higher one.²⁴

Marx's point is simply that distribution relations are only one of the forms adopted by the social relations of production (there are also forms of competition, forms of the state, forms of ideology, etc.). To regard distribution relations (composed of the forms of property ownership and revenue acquisition) as the basis of history, while ignoring the remaining forms adopted by the relations of production, is connected -- says Marx -- with a confused "identification of the process of social production with the simple labour process." In other words, the reduction of social relations to relations of distribution is premised upon the reduction of the process of social production down to a transhistorical

and exclusively material labour process between man (considered solely as material beings) and nature. Theorists working within the Stalinist tradition mistakenly identify the trans-historical character of the elements of the simple labour process with the historically specific form which the -- in this case -- capitalist production process adopts. This is the view which makes the production relations of capitalism eternal (certainly the very existence of distinct forms of class based property ownership and revenue acquisition are taken by the Stalinist tradition to be eternal features of all modes of production), while restricting history to alterations in the forms adopted by the relations of distribution (e.g., from "private" ownership of the means of production to "state ownership", but never abolition of property itself).

In the Grundrisse Marx demonstrated that behind the notion of distribution as the distribution of revenues derived from products, was a more fundamental distribution:

In the shallowest conception, distribution appears as the distribution of products.... But before distribution can be the distribution of products, it is: (1) the distribution of the instruments of production, and (2)...the distribution of the members of the society among the different kinds of production. (Subsumption of the individuals under specific relations of production.) The distribution of products is evidently only a result of this distribution, which is comprised within the process of production itself and determines the structure of production.²⁵

In this way, Marx provides that "the so-called relations of distribution are themselves relations of production". For that reason, it is clearly inconsistent "to view the bourgeois form of production as absolute, but the bourgeois form of distribution as historically relative, and hence transitory".²⁶ As Clarke explains, to understand the capitalist form of distribution, we need to realize that even before the capitalist derives his revenue from the process of production (i.e., the surplus value he obtains in the form of profit as revenue for being the owner of the means of production and labour power), and even before he changes his money capital into productive capital, he is a capitalist. The real question is "u

why can the capitalist buy the worker's labour power, while the worker cannot buy the means of production? Why can the labourer be united with the objective conditions of labour only under the domination of capital? The answer lies in the circumstances in which capitalist and labourer enter not production but circulation, the capitalist as owner of money capital ... the worker as owner of nothing but his or her labour power. The capitalist relation of production is, correspondingly, not founded on the relation between labourer and owner of means of production, but on that between free labour and capital.... The relation with which we are concerned is not fundamentally a property relation (in the narrow Stalinist use of the word -BM), but a relation between classes. This relation is not defined by the legal connection of the members of these classes to the elements of the labour process, but by the modes of participation of the different classes in the total process of social production. 27

Clarke's argument is but a summary of Marx's own, the latter made in several places throughout Capital and Theories of Surplus Value.²⁸

Stalin's technicist theory of production as a combination of a material technical labour process and distribution relations, ignores the production relations which Marx saw as essential to explaining distribution. By mechanically combining a reductionist concept of the labour process with an equally reductionist concept of the social relations of production, Stalin was able to produce a theory in which the class struggle was restricted to disputes over the quantity of revenues, rather than the existing class relations in all their manifold forms. (This same tendency is evident in the work of the many authors who see the value theory of labour as primarily a theory about the quantitative division of the revenue from surplus labour, rather than a critique of the specific social forms which the wage labour/capital social relation adopts.)²⁹ The variegated history of class societies is smoothed out to fit the universal and trans-historical categories of Stalin's metaphysical conception of history. In the process, Marx's conception of the possibility of a future without the domination of these same class relations is made possible.

The technicist view of production legitimizes a concept of socialism as state ownership and planning, despite

the absence of workers' control of the labour process, the state, and all the other forms adopted by the social relations. Socialism is identified with the elimination of a particular nexus of social forms -- those of capitalist private property/profit/wages -- rather than with the elimination of the more general social relations of production which underlie the "capitalist" social forms of property ownership and revenue acquisition. The task of socialist transformation is not simply to replace one form of property (i.e., private property) with another form (i.e., state property), but to abolish the underlying social relations which give rise to a class relation of 'property' in this sense. Stalin's Marxism does not hold out even the possibility of eliminating the existence of forms of property and revenue acquisition; only the possibility of giving them a new content. Little else can be expected from a theory which periodises human history on the basis of the content of a few social forms, abstracted from the totality of social relations of production.

The Stalinist understanding of production has important ramifications for the class struggle. Once the relations of production are reduced to relations of distribution that stem from the external nature of the material process of production, they cannot be challenged politically. Political activity is limited to capturing and using state power to

alter the balance of the existing relations of distribution, while the class struggle at the point of production (e.g., trade union struggles within capitalism) can accomplish little more than a shift in the relative advantage of classes in their division of the surplus. While the class struggle in production concerns only distribution (e.g., wages under capitalism), the completely separate political struggle is concerned exclusively with "political and legal measures to transform class relations, which are supposedly constituted by 'ownership' of the means of production".³⁰ In short, Stalinism is limited to a reformist political practice, under capitalism, because its view of human production precludes resistance to the class relations where they are produced and reproduced. Under capitalism, Communist political activity is directed toward reforming the bourgeois state, while its trade union work is calculated to win wage increases, without threatening the existing forms of the relations of production.³¹ Classes are understood as aggregates of individuals (under capitalism, the aggregate of property owners in the material instruments of production, the capitalists, on the one hand, and the owners of human muscle and bone, the workers, on the other hand) each fighting for a greater share of the revenue derived from the material process of production. Because the struggle is banished from production and from the labour process to the sphere of distribution, Stalinism ignores the

class struggles in the workplace over non-wage issues -- like control of the labour process.

When the technicist interpreters of Marxism reduce the working class to a material factor of production wielded by the ruling class, class struggle is restricted to a dispute over the terms of working class performance within the sphere of production. by definition, the working class is rendered incapable of questioning the very process of its reduction to such a material-technical factor of production. Having thus eliminated the possibility of class struggle over production, the role of the working class as the agent of history is displaced by the exploiting class. The transition to each new mode of production "is not determined by the struggle of the exploited and subordinate class, it is determined by the conscious and self-interested decisions of the exploiters,"³² each acting as the enlightened instrument of historical progress as determined by the laws of motion of the cosmos. By displacing human labour and the class struggle (i.e., the process of social and material objectification turned against the existing conditions of exploitation) as the driving force of history, the technicist version of Marxism makes it possible to place any number of substitutes at the center of history -- the most popular ones being technique, market relations, the enlightened ruling class and the struggle over distribution.

A number of theorists have identified this technicist version of historical materialism as the viewpoint of those technocratic managers of capitalism who see the private owners of capital as superfluous, and seek to displace them as the ruling class. Clarke has succinctly argued that the Stalinist (and for that matter, the Neo-Ricardian) view of production expresses the interests of a

technocracy which is radicalised by the experience of the growing contradiction between capital and labour expressed in terms of the growing irrationality of capitalism and not of the class struggle. It therefore underpins a utopian socialism based on a moral critique of capitalism which counterposes the rationality of the eternal relations of production to the irrationality introduced by bourgeois relations of distribution, and so seeks to overthrow the latter while preserving the former.³³

By contrast, the thoroughly Marxist view of production sees the class relation in all its forms as generated in production. The class struggle is thus placed at the center of historical development within class society, while the importance of both the struggle in the labour process and the political form of the struggle, are reaffirmed. Thus, the Marxist tradition stresses the need to combine the struggle at the point of production with the struggle for state power, the struggle for ideological hegemony, and so on. In short, it stresses the overall question of class domination and exploitation.³⁴

The conception of production shared by bourgeois political economy and Stalinism has to be compared with Marx's view of production as an indissoluble unity of the production of both social relations and material goods. Unlike the technicist view, "the relations of production are not separated from and contrasted with material production as an externally derived form imposed on a pre-existent content".³⁵ Nevertheless, the unity of the material and social sides of human production is, in class society, a contradictory unity. In all class societies, human production is dominated either by the consumption needs of the ruling class (i.e., in pre-capitalist modes of production where ruling class consumption includes military competition) or by the competitive need to accumulate capital within the capitalist mode of production (which also has its military and political forms).

Marx's view transforms history from a history of squabbles over the respective shares of the revenue derived from material production, a fight restricted to the sphere of distribution, into a history of class struggle that is rooted in the labour process and that pervades all the social relations reproduced by the existing classes. Class exploitation is then related to class domination in the labour process (e.g., in the capitalist mode of production) as well as in other social relations, like the state. The

concept of class struggle is greatly broadened, is given a character that pervades all aspects of human society, and allows for the possibility of social revolutions.

Throughout most of this discussion of the Stalinist conception of production, I have used examples which stem from Marx's analysis of the capitalist mode of production. For although both bourgeois political economy and Stalinist Marxism have inflated the apparent nature of capitalist production into metaphysical theories of human history, they have only managed to do so by rendering the specifically capitalist form of production eternal. Not surprisingly then, pre-capitalist modes of production are analysed from the standpoint of defenders of capitalism. The reductionist definition of the relations of production in terms of the ownership of the material factors of production

is in essence the imposition of the ideological form of the "trinity formula" on pre-capitalist modes of production. Pre-capitalist "relations of production" are, as I have noted, seen as politically imposed relations of distribution. To define these relations of distribution theoretically, in accordance with the trinity formula, it is necessary to seek "factors" to which to attribute the "revenues" of the various classes, revenues which fall to the class by virtue of its "ownership" of the factors. Hence it is necessary to transpose capitalist legal forms, most notably capitalist "ownership", into pre-capitalist modes of production to understand the relations of production of those modes as debased forms of the ideological interpretation of the capitalist relations of production. The application of this analysis to ... the development of capitalism ... (identifies it with -BM) the march of reason and universality, sweeping away these various artificial barriers so that the social relations already inscribed in the (material labour process -BM) ... can assert themselves. The development of capitalism is then seen as an

essentially political development. This follows ultimately from the failure to root "relations of production" in production, and so the belief that the transformation of the relations of production is conditioned by the political....³⁶

In this way the technicist theory of production eternalizes the capitalist relations of production, elevating them to the level of a metaphysical principle for the investigation of all human history. Allowances are made solely for the historical development of the forms of property ownership/ revenue acquisition, in other words, for the relations of distribution. It is not simply Stalin's concept of the labour process which is determinist and metaphysical, but also his concept of relations of production. By contrast, Marx does not impose a pre-established content on the labour process and the social relations of production, when investigating pre-capitalist modes of production. To be sure, his historical investigation is supported by his concept of production in general -- which orients him toward the peculiar forms adopted by the labour process, and the totality of social relations of production -- but it does not impose a pattern on history in accordance with a pre-arranged set of "laws of all human history".

The eternalization of the capitalist relations of production was subjected to a scathing critique by Marx in his attack on what he called the "fetishism" that stemmed from the nature of capitalist production. The same process of

eternalizing the capitalist form of social relations had as its flip side the identification of the material-technical factors of production as the true agents of history. Marx described the simultaneous processes of reification and personification in the phrase "the materialization of the social features of production and the personification of the material foundations of production."³⁷

Presupposing the radical separation of an exclusively material process of production and a social sphere in which people own the material factors of production, fetishism is a process of inversion through which capitalist social relations made the social forms adopted by men and the instruments of production (namely, wage labour and capital) appear to be an extension of their natural character. At the same time, the fetishism that arises from capitalist production reduces the social dimension of the human being to that of a mere owner of the material factor of production.³⁸

Rubin argues that theorists operating with a non-Marxist conception of production commit two kinds of errors: either they derive social phenomena directly from technical phenomena (reification) or they do exactly the opposite, deriving material phenomena directly from social ones (personification). In the former instance, the ability of capital to yield profit might be explained in terms of the technical functions of capital in the role of means of

production; in the latter, the power to increase the productivity of labour which is inherent in the technical aspect of the means of production might be assigned to capital (i.e., a specific social relation).

These two mistakes, which at first glance seem contradictory, can actually be reduced to the same basic methodological defect; the identification of the material process of production with its social form, and the identification of the technical functions of things with their social functions. Instead of considering technical and social phenomena as different aspects of human working activity, aspects which are closely related but different, vulgar economists (and we can add here, adherents of Stalin's Marxism -BM) put them on the same level....³⁹

Put differently, the unmediated identification of the material and social sides of production, in which human labour disappears as the middle term between the two, inevitably results in a fetishized conception of production.

The Stalinist tradition of Marxism is guilty of both of the errors described by Rubin. Stalinism reifies social relations through its treatment of them as derivative from an exclusively material technical process of production, that is the basis for eternalizing the social relations of capitalist production. If this reflects the determinism inherent in Stalinist theory, the voluntarism is represented by the manner in which Stalin represented the growth in the material productivity of the Soviet economy as stemming from the existence of nationalized property (i.e., "socialism"), rather than to the violent methods by which he had collectivized

agriculture and increased the subordination of the working class through the Five Year plans.⁴⁰

Finally, the technicist theory of production, which reduces production relations to the relations of distribution, yields a distributional theory of class. One of the most important peculiarities of this understanding of production is that the material-technical labour process

is analysed as the sphere in which individual capitalists (or, individual owners of the material factors of production -BM) pursue their own particular interests, those interests being discrete and fundamentally independent of one another.⁴¹

Classes are then defined by aggregating the owners of the material factors of production, and the groups which are recipients of the various forms of revenue from property ownership (wages, profits and rents as three forms of capitalist revenues are connected with the three material factors of production: muscle and bone, tools and raw materials, and the three major types of property owners: wage labourers, capitalists, and landholders). Hence, Stalinist historians typically begin their investigation not with the totality of class relations, but with particular forms of those relations considered in isolation.

But individuals cannot be aggregated together to form classes on the basis of their similarity as owners of a particular material factor of production,

revenues accrue to individuals not as owners of discrete factors of production, but as members of social classes who share as such in the distribution of the social product ... the "revenue sources" cannot themselves be conceptualised prior to class relations because they have social existence not as things, but as social relations.... It is not the factors of production that are the sources of revenue, for it is only because of the social forms within which these natural phenomena are inserted that they attract revenues to their owners in the sense that they become "sources by means of which one portion of value (in the capitalist mode of production -BM) is transformed into the form of profit, another into the form of rent, and a third into the form of wages".⁴²

For the followers of Stalin's account of historical materialism, social relations (i.e., the social relations of distribution) are defined in the context of the single productive unit, be it the capitalist enterprise, the feudal estate, or whatever. It is within the immediate exchange between owners of various material factors of production/recipients of various revenues, that classes are detected. These relations within the isolated productive unit are then aggregated to yield class relations on a national level. However, as Clarke has argued "class relations (as opposed to relations of distribution -BM) cannot be defined at the level of the enterprise".

Wage labour is only wage labour for capital when it is inserted within the class relation between capital and labour. Forced labour is only characteristically feudal when it is inserted in the feudal class relation of dependence. The relations of exploitation within the immediate process of production imply the existence of class relations within which social production takes place.

... It is the class relation between capital and free labour that is the precondition for the particular economic form of the relation between capital and wage-labour in the capitalist enterprise.⁴³

This is nothing but another way of saying that the source of particular relations of distribution must be sought in the social relations of production -- i.e., in class relations (as discussed above).

The idea that the relations of distribution within a single productive unit (whether that be a capitalist firm or a feudal estate) is an insufficient basis for establishing the character of an existing mode of production has been emphasized by Banaji. Distinguishing between the "form of exploitation" (i.e., the form adopted by the relations of distribution, like serfdom or wage labour) and the relations of production (which includes the forms of exploitation plus all the other forms which class relations adopt) enables Banaji to argue that

wage labour and the capitalist mode of production are concepts based at different levels, even though the latter presupposes the former. Thus capitalism cannot be defined in terms of the existence or non-existence of wage labour, for the latter is only transformed into a capitalist relation of production under certain historical conditions, in the first place its insertion into a framework of extended reproduction where "unlimited expansion, perpetual progress, becomes the law of production", in contrast to all pre-capitalist modes of production where "production was every time resumed in the same form and on the same scale as previously". Wage labour as such, as a relation of exploitation, is possible and has occurred historically in a simple reproduction context....⁴⁴

Because the Stalinist tradition reduces the concept of relations of production to the form of exploitation, it mechanically identifies feudalism with the prevalence of serfdom and deduces capitalism from the presence of wage labour. Banaji argues that at least 90% of Marxists make this mistake giving, for example, a "circulationist definition of 'wage labour' ... in terms of properties that describe the situation of the commodity owner (i.e., the owner of a material factor of production in the form of bones and muscle -BM)."45

It was just this sort of reduction of wage labour from a class relation to a mere form of exploitation that explains

why Marx can write ... that although the wage form (the formal transactional equality between wage labour and capital) is a "form of mediation intrinsic to" developed capitalism, "there are those who regard this superficial relation, this essential formality, this deceptive appearance of capitalist relation as its true essence." "They thereby gloss over the essential nature of the relationship (between wage labour and capital -BM)."46

By contrast, Banaji insists that wage labour must be defined "in terms of the relation of living labour to capital," a view in which the essential class relations of production can adopt a variety of forms of exploitation other than the wage labour form. In other words, Banaji seeks to establish

that capitalism is compatible with the most brutal and barabric forms of labour, that wage labour (in the sense of the class relation of wage labour/capital -BM), labour which produces capital, can take a series of unfree forms, implying various degrees of coercion and bondage.47

Only the distinction between the relations of production and the form of exploitation enables us to comprehend Marx's discussion of 19th century child labour in Britain as specifically capitalist in character, despite the fact that this labour was exploited without being "freely sold" to capital. (In fact, as Banaji points out, Marx referred to the worker who sold the labour power of his children as "a slave dealer".⁴⁸)

The reduction of Marx's "relations of production" to the concept "form of exploitation" is nowhere more evident than in the work of the British Communist economist Maurice Dobb. It is he who developed the most elaborate effort to employ Stalin's conception of historical materialism in an explanation of the origins of capitalist development. Beginning with an uncritical acceptance of the technicist conception of production -- evident in his economic writings like Political Economy and Capitalism -- Dobb periodised the European transition in his book Studies in the Development of Capitalism.⁴⁹

Dobb premised the entire structure of his book on the reductionist conception of the feudal mode of production as equivalent to 'serfdom' (a form of exploitation):

The emphasis of this definition will lie, not in the juridical relation between vassal and sovereign ... but in the relation between the direct producer ... and his immediate superior or overlord in the socio-economic content of the obligation which

connects them. ... this definition will characterize Feudalism primarily as "a mode of production"; and ... as such it will be virtually identical with what we generally mean by serfdom: an obligation laid on the producer by force and independently of his own volition to fulfil certain economic demands of an overlord....⁵⁰

When Sweezy challenged this identification of feudalism with serfdom on the grounds that serfdom was common to other modes of production besides feudalism,⁵¹ Dobb replied that the incidental and subordinate role of serfdom in other modes of production

no more suffices to constitute the form of economy in question as feudal than does the incidental existence of hired wage-labour suffice to constitute a particular society capitalist.⁵²

It was left to Banaji to draw the obvious conclusion:

- In other terms, ... what makes an economy "capitalist" is the statistical preponderance of the simple abstraction "labour power as a commodity".⁵³

Because "wage labour" as a commodity was known well before the rise of the capitalist mode of production, what rendered it specifically capitalist wage labour, what made the availability of the commodity labour power the basis of a distinct and historically specific mode of production (and therefore transformed wage labour into a specifically capitalist social relation of production) was not simply its statistical preponderance, its generalization. For Marx, it was only when wage labour became "capital positing, capital

producing labour", that it became capitalist wage labour.⁵⁴

Banaji presents several examples from the work of Lenin and Marx to prove that neither reduced the relations of production to the form of exploitation. Summarising his presentation of part of Lenin's argument, Banaji writes:

as simple commodity producers (in Russia -BM) are subordinated to the power of capital, in town or village, and specifically bourgeois relations of production develop, far from transforming bondage and serf forms of exploitation into specifically capitalist forms of exploitation, i.e., those forms which correspond to the "classical, adequate mode of production of capital", these new relations of production, founded on capital, intensify the existing backward forms of exploitation: these forms remain "feudal" or "semi-feudal" in character, while the relations of production acquire a bourgeois character. Because Lenin understood this mechanism, he could refer ... to "semi-feudal forms of appropriation of surplus value".⁵⁵

In one of several other examples, Banaji mentions that Marx himself had spoken about the production of "surplus value" in the cotton plantations of the American South.

For Marx, such simple forms of the social relations of production as "wage labour" or "serfdom" (i.e., forms of exploitation) could not be understood as abstract, indeterminate and transhistorical social forms which identified the existence of different modes of production. Capital was Marx's effort to go beyond such a simplistic view and investigate "the laws of motion of capitalist production, in the course of which a series of simple abstractions (e.g., wage labour as a form of exploitation -BM) ... were historically

concretized as bourgeois relations of production."⁵⁶ In other words, the capitalist character of "wage labour", or the feudal character of "serfdom" can only be established in the context of the remaining forms adopted by the social relations of production. To establish that wage labour is specifically capitalist, it is necessary to show that it is subordinated to the laws of motion of the capitalist mode of production -- that it is capital positing and capital reproducing wage labour. Capitalist wage labour is based on an appropriation of surplus labour that is systematically subordinated to the expansion of value. The expanded reproduction of capital must be shown to have shaped the process of surplus extraction regardless of the immediate form of appearance which the process took.⁵⁷ Banaji concludes that

the substance of Marx's analysis lies in its definition of the laws of motion of capitalist production: the production and accumulation of surplus value, the revolutionization of the labour process, the production of relative surplus value on the basis of a capitalistically constituted labour process, the compulsion to increase the productivity of labour, etc. The "relations of capitalist production" are the relations which express and realize these laws of motion at different levels of the social process of production. They are, as Marx calls them ... "all the economic relations which are merely the necessary relations of the particular mode of production". As modes of production are only a definite totality of historical laws of motion, relations of production thus become a function of the given mode of production. The character of any definite type of production relations, is, in short, impossible to determine until these laws of motion are themselves determined.⁵⁸

This completes our discussion of Marx's concept of the social relations of production. We see that instead of Stalin's metaphysical laws of motion of all history based on a technicist conception of production and a distributional theory of class, Marx's theory is premised on a view of production as simultaneously material and social. Our discussion of Marx's notion of property indicates that instead of periodising and explaining history as a succession of different forms of property relations, that Marx was concerned with the totality of social relations of production. He moved beyond the form of exploitation revealed in the distribution relations to examine all the forms which the production relations adopted and the specific laws of motion they generated within an historically unique mode of production. The significance of this discussion will be only too apparent when we see that Ryerson's writings exhibit the technicist view of production, a distributional theory of class, and a preoccupation with the form of exploitation.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER V

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5. ibid., p. 123.
6. ibid., pp. 123-6.
7. Grundrisse, Vintage Books 1973, pp. 491 and 495.
8. See "Althusserian Marxism" by Simon Clarke, in One Dimensional Marxism: Althusser and the Politics of Culture, Allison and Busby, 1980, pp. 64-65.
9. ibid., pp. 64-65.
10. Grundrisse, pp. 87-8.
11. ibid., p. 496.
12. cited in Jordan, Karl Marx ..., p. 99.
13. The Poverty of Philosophy, Karl Marx, Progress Publishers, 1973, p. 134.
14. see "Socialist Humanism and the Critique of Economism", by Simon Clarke, in History Workshop, #8, 1979, pp. 142-3.
15. cited in "Marxism, Sociology, and Poulantzas' Theory of the State", by Simon Clarke, in Capital and Class, #2, 1977, p. 10.
16. ibid.
17. see Clarke, "Althusserian Marxism", op. cit., p. 17.
18. see "The Necessity of Value -- and a Return to Marx", parts I and II, by Peter Green, in International Socialism, #3 (Winter 78/79 and #4 (Spring 1979); "The Current Crisis of Economic Theory", by Michael Lebowitz, Science and Society, volume 37, #4 (Winter 73-74);

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19. This is especially evident in Dobb's books Theories of Value and Distribution Since Adam Smith, Cambridge University Press, 1973; and, in a preliminary way in his earlier Political Economy and Capitalism, International Publishers, 1945, and Studies in the Development of Capitalism, International Publishers, 1947. Another important book in this current is Ronald Meeks' Studies in the Labour Theory of Value, Monthly Review Press, 1956.
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21. ibid.
22. see The Making of Marx's Capital, by Roman Rosdolsky, Pluto Press, 1977, p. 29.
23. Capital, Volume III, by Karl Marx, Progress Publishers, 1966, p. 817.
24. ibid., pp. 883-4.
25. Grundrisse, p. 96.
26. cited in Rosdolsky, op. cit., p. 30.
27. Clarke, "Althusserian Marxism", op. cit., p. 61.
28. see Capital, volume III, op. cit., pp. 878-9; also see volume III of Theories of Surplus Value, by Karl Marx, Progress publishers, 1973, p. 475.
29. see for example Green's articles cited above (footnote #92), and Essays on Marx's Theory of Value, by I. I. Rubin, Black Rose Books, 1973, and Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism, ed. Diane Elson, CSE Books, 1979.
30. Clarke, "Althusserian Marxism", p. 38.
31. Clarke, "Marxism, Sociology ..." op. cit., p. 8.
32. Clarke, "Socialist Humanism..." op. cit., p. 149.
33. Clarke, "Althusserian Marxism", op. cit., p. 82; also see Lebowitz, as cited in footnote #92 above.

34. Clarke, "Althusserian Marxism", pp. 38-9.
35. *ibid.*, p. 18.
36. *ibid.*, pp. 64 and 99 (see Clarke's footnote #117).
37. Capital, Volume III, p. 880.
38. see Essays on Marx's Theory of Value, by I.I. Rubin, Black RCse, 1973, p. 28.
39. *ibid.*
40. see the analysis by Tony Cliff in State Capitalism in Russia, Pluto Press, 1974.
41. see Clarke's "Capital, Fractions of Capital and the State: 'neo-Marxist' Analyses of the South African State", in Capital and Class #5, 1978, p. 37.
42. *ibid.*, p. 39.
43. Clarke's "Socialist Humanism...", *op. cit.*, pp. 140-1.
44. see "For a Theory of Colonial Modes of Production", by Jairus Banaji, in Economic and Political Weekly, December 23, 1972, p. 2498.
45. see "Gunder Frank in Retreat" by Jairus Banji, in Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. 9, #4, 1979, p. 486.
46. *ibid.*; the internal quotes from Marx are from Capital Vol. I, p. 1064.
47. *ibid.*
48. *ibid.*, p. 847; see also Capital, Vol. I, p. 519.
49. see "The Value Theory of Labour" by Diane Elson, in Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism, CSE Books, 1979, pp. 115-128; "Commerce and Civilization: A Critique of the Classical Theory of the Origins of Capitalism," unpublished paper by David McNally, Toronto, 1979, pp. 47-62; "Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International" in From Rousseau to Lenin, by Lucio Colletti, Monthly Review Press, 1972; also see Maurice Dobb's Political Economy and Capitalism, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1940, and Studies in the Development of Capitalism, revised edition, International Publishers, 1963.

51. see Paul Sweezy's review of Dobb's book "A Critique", in The Transition From Feudalism to Capitalism, ed. Rodney Hilton, New Left Books, 1976, p. 33.
52. see Dobb's "A Reply" in The Transition ..., p. 57.
53. see "Modes of Production in a Materialist Conception of History", by Jairus Banaji, in Capital and Class, #3, Autumn 1977, p. 7.
54. Grundrisse, p. 463.
55. Banaji, "Modes of Production ...", p. 8.
56. ibid., p. 9.
57. McNally, "Commerce and Civilization...", p. 102.
58. Banaji, "Modes of Production...", p. 10.

CHAPTER VI

BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE, AND THE PARTY USES OF THEORY:
THE DOCTRINE OF 'PARTIINOST'

As I explained above, 'Stalinist Marxism' has traditionally divided the social relations of production into two discrete and only externally related categories -- social relations of the "economic base", and those of the "superstructure". We have seen that the former are thought of as relationships of property ownership (i.e., distribution relations). On the other hand, legal, political and ideological phenomena are understood to be "superstructural" and derivative in character. Having established the reductionist nature of Stalin's concept of the relations of production, it is now necessary to analyze his employment of the base/superstructure model.

Those who adhere to the base/superstructure model have conventionally supported their interpretation by citing Marx's famous 1859 Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, in which he wrote:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society -- the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.¹

This passage has been widely misinterpreted as counterposing property relations (in the narrow sense) to all other social relations. Such a view is clearly mistaken, since Marx also argues that:

The social structure and the state are continually evolving out of the life process of definite individuals.... as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will.²

Here, all social relations clearly have the same source, the social and material objectification of individuals. On that basis, both the social structure and the state are part of the totality of social relations which emerge within the total process of production.

! In the German Ideology, Marx writes,

definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political relations. Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and and speculation, the connection of the social and political/^{super}structure with production.³

And in Wage Labour and Capital, Marx indicates that the social relations of production include all

the social relations within which individuals produce.... The relations of production in their totality constitute what is called the social relations, society....⁴

Such comments hardly support the effort to mechanically divide social phenomena into the categories base and superstructure.

The quote from the German Ideology above begins with the premise

that social and political relations are inextricably connected, and argues that the⁴ specific form of that connection is unique to particular modes of production, rather than being meta-physically predetermined by the very nature of human production. In other words, the relation between social and political relations within a given mode of production is not deducible from Marx's concept of production in general, from his trans-historical concepts. As Sayer puts it,

In the absence of such a general theory (as provided in Stalinist Marxism by the allegedly transhistorical quality of the relation between the base and the superstructure -BM) however, we lose any rational grounds for restricting the category of production relations in the classical fashion; for a priori we have no more reason to expect any one kind of relation to be essential to production than any other. What relations are involved in specific forms of production ... is an empirical question....⁵

Sayer offers a plausible alternative explanation:

the base/superstructure metaphor can best be seen as a popular way of expressing a distinction which is fundamental to Marx's work, namely the distinction between essential relations and their forms of manifestation. Essential relations can be said to comprise any society's 'economic structure', not by virtue of any innately 'economic' qualities they might possess but because of their entailment in the production process.... the superstructure, in this view, would consist not of a separate body or kind of relations but rather of the "legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic -- in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of these relations themselves."⁶

He also provides a concise description of the distinction between phenomenal forms and essential relations which Marx

employs through his writings:

Phenomenal forms are ... those forms in which the phenomena of the external world 'represent themselves' in people's experience. This does not imply ... that human activity plays no role in constructing the world that thus presents itself.... It merely presupposes that at any given point there exists a constituted world whose phenomena have achieved what Marx calls 'the stability of natural, self-understood forms of social life' and which in the first instance confronts its participants as a simple datum. Essential relations, in Marx's terminology, are those relations whose existence explains why phenomena should take such forms. They are essential, therefore, not in any mystical or immanentist sense, but simply as conditions of existence of the phenomenal forms themselves. Unlike phenomenal forms, Marx holds, essential relations need not be transparent to direct experience. Phenomenal forms may be such as to mask or obscure the relations of which they are the forms of manifestation.⁷

Several commentators have pointed to the number of social relations which cannot be confined within the conventional base superstructure model. Rader, in his book Marx's Interpretation of History, claims that such phenomena as "Science and technology, law, politics, religion, morality, art, and philosophy transcend the dualism of base and superstructure."⁸ For example, he cites Marx on the interpenetration of science with material production:

Natural science has penetrated all the more, practically into human life through industry. It has transformed human life and prepared the emancipation of humanity, even though its immediate effect was to accentuate the déhumanization of man. Industry is the actual historical relationship of nature, and thus of natural science, to man....⁹

Ollman similarly cuts to the core of the problem with his comment that property and class relations transcend the supposed boundaries of the Stalinist version of the base/superstructure model:

property relations as a system of legal claims comes under the heading of superstructure, but they are also a component of the relations of production which 'determines' this superstructure. The same difficulty arises with class struggle, which constitutes part of the political life of society while also being an element in the economic structure that is said to 'determine' political life.¹⁰

Sayer shows the absurdity of the base/superstructure model, by pointing out that Marx's discussion of the feudal corvée in Volume III of Capital is inconsistent with the conventional view. According to Marx, in the direct relationship of lordship and servitude surplus labour is pumped out of the serfs "by other than economic pressure".¹¹ Those pressures are, instead, political. Marx writes that "conditions of personal dependence are requisite, a lack of personal freedom, no matter to what extent, and being tied to the soil as its accessory, bondage in the true sense of the word". Similarly, when discussing the transition from feudalism to capitalism in the Grundrisse, Marx argues that "the governments ... of Henry VII, VIII etc. appear as conditions of the historic dissolution process and as makers of the conditions for the existence of capital". Sayer concludes that the "supposedly superstructural relations are, quite simply, 'social relations within which

individuals produce' and without which they could not produce in these particular ways".¹²

Stalinist Marxism has persistently misunderstood Marx's concepts, by reducing their content to coincide with the mechanical boundaries of the base/superstructure model. Two such concepts are the state (a supposedly 'superstructural' phenomenon) and social relations of production, defined as property relations (where property refers to the ownership of a material factor of production). An examination of each in turn prepares the way for a thorough critique of Stalinist theory and its impoverished concepts.

Hal Draper's recent excavation of Marx's views on the state -- which can be found in his Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution: Volume I State and Bureaucracy¹³ -- indicate that Marx's discussions of the Asiatic mode of production and the phenomenon of "Bonapartism" both violate the base/superstructure dichotomy. In both cases, Marx is concerned with the autonomization of political power from the remainder of society. That these examples should be ignored by the Stalinist tradition of Marxism is not surprising, considering the similarity of Marx's discussion to that of twentieth century Marxists who have criticised the state capitalist nature of the Soviet state.¹⁴ The Bonapartist state's usurpation of power from the erstwhile 'ruling class' in 19th century France, has more than a passing similarity to Stalin's infamous

"revolution from above".

Marx's writings on Bonapartism indicate a belief that a capitalist state could become the predominant 'capitalist' within society, in other words, that a super-structural relation could become the dominant relation of production. The Credit Mobilier was a huge 19th century banking institution cum holding corporation organised under Bonaparte, to stimulate industrial development and finance public works. In analysing this unique development in France, Marx referred to the government as a "capitalist" while seeing the state as a social agent in support of no class or group other than itself.¹⁵ Draper elaborates,

The picture (Marx's analysis of Bonapartism paints -BM) is of a state which has pushed its autonomization to the extreme point, where it is no longer the resultant of the actual class forces in society but rather stands in antagonism to all the social classes of civil society. To be sure, this state is the result of a historical process through which this class society has actually gone, but the result is that the political superstructure has torn loose from the social foundations which produced it. It has assumed an independent life of its own in the fullest sense.¹⁶

On any understanding of the base/superstructure model advanced by Stalinism, Marx's analysis of Bonapartism becomes incompatible with his materialist conception of history. It is only when we understand that the state is a social relation of production, like all other social relations, that state autonomization becomes explainable.

The same notion of state dominated relations of production was employed in Marx's examination of the Asiatic mode of production. In that society, the form of surplus labour appropriation was tribute to the state. This tribute collecting state, which ruled in its own interests and not those of any other class, displayed a complete fusion of economic and political power. Draper summarizes Marx's discussion:

The tributary relationship -- unlike the slave relationship, serf relationship, or wage labour relationship -- is scarcely conceivable except as a relationship between the producers on the one hand and the ruling political power on the other. In the case of the other three, the relationship of exploitation appears as a relationship between two classes of civil society, between a class of producers and a class of private property owners. In these cases, the state normally arises as the instrument or guardian of the economic rulers, the owning class. But in the tributary relationship, the relationship of exploitation is between the producers and the state itself, directly. Put another way: in the case of the other three modes of exploitation, economic exploitation and political rule are related in a certain way; but in the tributary mode, economic exploitation and political rule are fused in the same hands.¹⁷

In both these cases, Marx identifies as internal to the 'economic' structure of society (i.e., the base), relations which are supposedly superstructural. He violates the base/superstructure model because he never dichotomized social relations, making them only externally related, with some subordinate to others in Stalin's mechanical way. Marx's

writings on the Paris Commune provide further evidence that he never adhered to the base/superstructure model.

There is no doubt that both Marx and Engels viewed the Paris Commune of 1871 as living proof of their theoretical work, as an example of the beginning of a transition from capitalism to socialism -- the dictatorship of the proletariat. Several years after the defeat of the Commune, Engels wrote "... do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the proletariat". In The Civil War in France, Marx discussed the features of this workers' state:

The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms.... The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time. Instead of continuing to be the agent of the central government, the police was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible and at all times revocable agent of the Commune. So were the officials of all the other branches of the administration. From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at workmen's wages.... Having once got rid of the standing army and the police ... the Commune was anxious to break the spiritual force of repression ... by the disestablishment and disendowment of all churches as proprietary bodies.... The whole of the educational institutions were opened to the public gratuitously, and ... like the rest of public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible and revocable.¹⁸

This workers' state had risen on the wreckage of the old state apparatus, since "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes".¹⁹

Only by eliminating the political basis for the class power of the old ruling class, could the transition to a classless society begin. The Commune was the political form which would enable "the economical emancipation of Labour" to proceed.

As Marx explained,

The Commune was therefore to serve as a lever for uprooting the economical foundations upon which rest the existence of classes, and therefore of class rule.²⁰

The establishment of the Commune was to initiate a protracted struggle between classes, in which the working class -- by virtue of its monopoly of state power -- would gradually wrest control of production from the old ruling class.

Such is the Commune -- the political form of the social emancipation ... of labour from the usurpation ... of the monopolists of the means of labour.... As the state machinery and parliamentarism are not the real life of the ruling classes, but only the organised general organs of their domination ... so the commune is not the social movement of the working class ... but the organised means of action.... The working classes know that they have to pass through different phases of class struggle. They know that the superseding of the economical conditions of the slavery of labour by the conditions of free and associated labour can only be the progressive work of time ... that they require not only a change of distribution, but a new organisation of production, or rather the delivery ... of the social forms of production in present organised labour ... of the trammels of slavery, of their present class character.... They know that the present "spontaneous action of the natural laws of capital and landed property" can only be superseded by "the spontaneous action of the laws of the social economy of free and associated labour" in a long process of development of new conditions.... But they know at the same time that great strides may be (made) at once through the communal form of political organisation....²¹

There are several important points to be made about Marx's description of the transition from capitalism to socialism. First, he did not specify that the abolition of private ownership of the means of production was essential to the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. He recognized, as quoted above, that the transition to socialism required not simply "a change of distribution, but a new organisation of production". Second, that in the transition to socialism, it was the strategic elimination of the old social form of political power (i.e., the state) that would permit the elimination of all the other forms which the capitalist social relations had adopted. Marx does not see the state as a secondary and derivative social form that stems from a class relationship defined by property ownership. The state, and other ostensibly 'superstructural' phenomena, were not simply instruments of the "social relations of production" in Stalin's sense (i.e., property relations), they were particular forms of the overall social relations of production. This is an important point, but before expanding upon it, we have to investigate Stalin's writings on the base/superstructure question.

As already seen, Stalin affirmed the gulf between material reality and social being, and the derivative character of the latter in his discussion of the relation between nature and mind. Material nature is held to be "an objective reality

existing outside and independently of our mind". As the necessary corollary of this dualism, the recombination of the two is effected in a reductionist manner. Thus, "matter is primary, since it is the source of sensations, ideas, mind, and that mind is secondary, derivative, since it is a reflection of matter".²² Stalin himself drew the parallel between his argument on the relation of mind and nature, and his view of the relation between the material side of human production and its social side:

if nature, being, the material world, is primary, and mind, thought, is secondary, derivative; if the material world represents objective reality existing independently of the mind of men, while the mind is a reflection of this objective reality, it follows that the material life of society, its being, is also primary, and its spiritual life secondary, derivative, and that the material life of society is an objective reality existing independently of the will of men, while the spiritual life of society is a reflection of this objective reality, a reflection of being.²³

In this quote, the "material life of society" refers to the economic base, while the "spiritual life" of society, the derivative phenomena, are superstructural. The latter are not the product of the social objectification of human beings, but are merely the reflection of the social relations of production in the mind. Thus

the source of formation of the spiritual life of society, the origin of social ideas, social theories, political views and political institutions, should not be sought for in the ideas, theories, views and political institutions themselves, but in the conditions of the material

life of society, in social being, of which these ideas, theories, views, etc. are the reflection.²⁴

Stalin duplicates the dualism inherent in his view of the 'economic base' as the addition of social relations of distribution to a material technical labour process, by conceiving of the relationship between the base and superstructural phenomena in the same non-dialectical and mechanical way. Thus, for example, political forms and property forms are not understood as social forms of the same class relation, stemming from the same processes of social objectification carried on within human production. Because political and ideological forms are simply the reflection of the base, they lose their socially constructed quality as social relations created by the labour of men. Instead, they become products of the base, in Stalin's objectivistic analysis.

But Stalin was not content with a simple mechanical determinism, in which superstructural phenomena were viewed as the product of the base. He argued that the determinism of the base was supplemented by the reaction of the superstructure back on the base.

Social ideas, theories and political institutions, having arisen on the basis of the urgent tasks of the development of the material life of society ... themselves then react upon social being, upon the material life of society....²⁵

Stalin denied all suggestions that Marxism saw superstructural phenomena as having,

no significance in the life of society, that they do not reciprocally affect social being.... As regards the significance of social ideas, theories, views and political institutions, as regards their role in history, historical materialism, far from denying them, stresses the role and importance of these factors in the life of society, in its history.²⁶

This theory of interaction between the base and superstructure does nothing to restore the dialectical unity of material and social phenomena as products of human labour. Nor does it counter the dualistic nature of Stalin's theory, because it presupposes that the base and superstructure are mutually exclusive and discrete entities, only externally related to one another. Moreover, this interaction version of historical causality did not challenge the ultimately determinant nature of the base, and within the base, of the material technical labour process. Those theorists who chose to downplay the determinist quality of this version of historical materialism were left with only one option: to discard technological determinism for a pluralistic theory in which many 'factors' became important. In any event, Marx's idea that human labouring activity was the driving force in history is completely absent, and the dualism inherent in the theory is preserved.

Stalin distinguished between the origins of superstructural phenomena and their significance. In the former can be seen the operation of technological determinism, while in the latter is vested a certain philosophical idealism.

Social ideas, theories and political institutions, having arisen on the basis of the urgent tasks of the development of the material life of society ... themselves then react upon social being, upon the material life of society, creating the conditions necessary for completely carrying out the urgent tasks of the material life of society, and for rendering its further development possible.²⁷

But Stalin argued there were two different kinds of superstructural phenomena:

There are old ideas and theories which have outlived their day and which serve the interests of the moribund forces of society. Their significance lies in the fact that they hamper the development, the progress of society. Then there are new and advanced ideas and theories which serve the interests of the advanced forces of society. Their significance lies in the fact that they facilitate the development, the progress of society..... New social ideas and theories arise only after the development of the material life of society has set new tasks before society. But once they have arisen they become a most potent force which facilitates the carrying out of the new tasks set by the development of the material life of society, a force which facilitates the progress of society. It is precisely here that the tremendous organizing, mobilizing and transforming value of new ideas, new theories, new political views and new political institutions manifests itself.²⁸

This emphasis on the importance of superstructural phenomena to the course of history, and in particular, the stress on the role of ideas, is a transparent justification of Stalin's ideological control within the USSR. In his 1950 Marxism and Linguistics, Stalin combined the material technical determinism of the base with the possibility of a superstructural voluntarism, quite obviously identifying the superstructure with the role of the party itself:

the superstructure is a product of the base; but this does not mean that it merely reflects the base, that it is passive, neutral, indifferent to the fate of its base, to the fate of the classes, to the character of the system. On the contrary, no sooner does it arise than it becomes an exceedingly active force, actively assisting its base to take shape and consolidate itself, and doing everything it can to help the new system finish off and eliminate the old base and the old classes.²⁹

The superstructure (read the party, and more particularly, the leader of the party -- Stalin himself) was indeed the product of the cosmic laws of the dialectical evolution of the base, but once created it held complete sway over the base (read the direct producers acting as material factors of production, and the social relations of distribution which determine their levels of consumption). Stalin's crude and unmediated addition of a variety of idealism onto his essentially mechanistic and deterministic version of Marxism meant the presence of an immense theoretical and philosophical inconsistency at the heart of his theory of historical materialism. Harris has pointed out that Stalinism emphasizes two contradictory view of human reality: first,

a 'material base' to society, the economic functioning of society, as almost independent of men. Ideas merely 'reflected' material reality ... and political consciousness merely 'reflected' the state of technology -- put crudely, gasometers produce poetry via men. The actual lumps of the economic base -- steel plants, cranes, factories and so on -- seemed to possess a life of their own and to compel society to transform itself in conformity with this life.... There is little or no interaction between the base and the rest of society, the

'superstructure', only the base dragging the reluctant superstructure along behind it....

But second,

A crucial role for theory, for 'the tremendous organizing, mobilizing and transforming value of new ideas, new theories, new political views and new political institutions'. The embodiment of the role of ideas was the party offering leadership to the otherwise unliberated, confused masses.... For Stalin, his stress on the role of theory embodied his demand that the party should reach a 'correct' view of the world since its role was supreme in transforming society; theory was the one weapon of the party that it could acknowledge publicly. The party's monopoly of theory thus symbolized the party's monopoly of power.... The monopoly of theory was heightened, stressed, by the contention that mass consciousness always lags behind correct theory....

Harris then concludes:

The central contradiction in Stalinism is then between determinism and party voluntarism; determinism for the masses, voluntarism for the leadership..... The division is a class division between the necessarily passive majority and the active ruling class, enjoying a monopoly of legitimate initiative. The contradiction was of no great importance to the advocates of Stalinism, and was effectively resolved in practice through Stalin's monopoly (critically backed by force) of the right to define at any given moment what the material base was or was becoming and therefore what correct theory was.³⁰

Jordan has correctly points out that Stalin never attempted to reconcile these two completely inconsistent and equally mistaken interpretations of historical materialism: Stalin did not oscillate between these two attitudes because he was unable to solve the problem of determinism versus voluntarism; he simply refused to pay any attention to it on a theoretical level.³¹

Indeed, it was this peculiar combination of technological determinism coupled with extreme voluntarism that enabled Stalin to rationalize his "revolution from above", the forced collectivization of agriculture and the industrialization of Russia. As Jordan puts it,

The first version of historical materialism (i.e., the determinist version -BM) helped to support theoretically the infallibility of the party and its leaders in whatever they did, but otherwise it played a subordinate role.... Stalin resorted to the version of historical materialism which substituted the principle of activism for the principle of determinism ... whenever the materialist conception of history was to sanction the necessity and to justify the efficacy of long term, extremely difficult and uncertain plans of action (such, for instance, as the first five-year plan).... (It is these -BM) oscillations between incompatible conceptions, evaluated solely from the point of view of their momentary practical efficiency, which constitutes the most extreme form of voluntarism (inherent in Stalin's theory -BM).³²

With Stalin's consolidation of political power in the Soviet Union came a fundamental transformation in the notion of 'partiinost' (the Russian term for partisanship or 'party-mindedness'). In its original formulation, the notion of partiinost meant simply that all thought was partisan, and that -- as Lenin argued -- "In a society torn by class antagonism there can never be a non-class or above-class ideology."³³ Lenin believed that Marxists should recognize this, and align themselves openly and consistently with the cause of the working class.

Under Stalin, the principle of partiinost was fundamentally altered:

In the Stalinist period the principle of partiinost ... meant the unconditional submission to what the Party leadership declared to be true in each particular case and required the recognition of the principle that though individuals may err the Party was infallible. ... Expressed in practical terms, the Stalinist principle of partiinost implied that 'every political deviation had philosophical roots, every philosophical deviation political offshoots, while philosophical orthodoxy was to be found in the correct Party line and only there.' Consequently, political controversies became theological rather than philosophical disputes. (Likewise, historical controversies also became theological disputes -BM). The point at issue was no longer the discovery of truth but the establishment of the line between orthodoxy and heresy.³⁴

Jordan points out that there is an extreme instrumentalism inherent in Stalin's view of knowledge. Because political action requires a judgement about the existing political and economic circumstances, in addition to one about the most suitable means to achieve the desired end, theory must be more than simply a guide to action -- a method of establishing the correct strategy. It must also be in constant dialogue with empirical reality to establish the circumstances within which political action may occur. Stalin sought to dispense with knowledge, and reduce theory to a choice between means as a prelude to action. Because of his extreme voluntarism, Stalin's theory was based on the primacy of the will over the intellect.

When Marxian teaching was reduced to a set of organizational, tactical, and strategic directives

of how to remake social and historical existence, its ... instrumental aspect was bound to pre-dominate over and finally absorb its theoretical and cognitive content. This interpretation of the Marxian doctrine ... (is -BM) called 'voluntarism' ... for it involves the belief that the will is the inner and true nature of man and intellect is a mere tool of the will. ... voluntarism asserts the primacy of the will over the intellect and over material conditions (i.e., the existing circumstances of action -BM)....³⁵

Stalin, of course, always claimed to be acting in accordance with theory, in accordance with the theoretical knowledge derived from the operation of the cosmic laws of dialectical materialism. Yet, it was he, Stalin

who determined what was or was not in conformity to the theory. Ultimately it was not the theory which determined what should be done in practical terms; the will of the leader decided what the theory should imply.³⁶

Communist theory degenerated to a pre-occupation with confirming the latest revelations about the manner in which the laws of the cosmos were operating -- as revealed by the authority of the Party. Premised as it was upon the theoretical foundations of Stalin's theorizing about the laws of motion of all matter, Communist theory was an exercise in obscurantism rather than an analysis of the realities of the class struggle.

Under Stalin, only the highest echelons of the Party leadership or he himself had the right to develop new theories; "everyone else, was assigned the role of a popularizer or a commentator." The deification of Stalin, coupled with his monopolistic control over correct theory meant that

the truth was not what corresponded to facts, to empirical research, but what Comrade Stalin had declared to be true. Quotations from "the classics of Marxism-Leninism," and above all from the newly canonized classics of Stalin, became the main proof that a given proposition was true. Inconvenient facts were juggled, distorted, or simply ignored.³⁷

For Stalin, theory was a necessary accompaniment, an elaborate verbal justification for his pragmatic political manoeuvres. The 'theoretical' system that resulted from his construction of state capitalism in the Soviet Union was an intellectual house of cards which came crashing down in 1956. When theory is degraded to mere justification, then the constant flow of rationalizations which accumulate must eventually explode as they encounter the truth. As Jordan explains,

Stalin's exposition of dialectical materialism could not be sustained and enforced without corrupting the critical ability and intellectual integrity of its adherents. It ... tended to create social myths.... views about social reality unsupported by, or conflicting with, ascertainable facts. These myths undermined the very assumptions they were supposed to serve.³⁸

The reliance upon partiinost in the Stalinized Communist Parties meant that both theoretical speculation and empirical research were simultaneously discredited. The mixture of the two was even more seriously frowned upon. Stalinist intellectuals like Ryerson were crippled on both fronts. Destroyed was the conception of history that E.H. Carr has described as "a continuous process of interaction between the

historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past."³⁹

Shteppa's study of Soviet historiography led him to argue that Stalinist historians had to be prepared to ignore inconvenient facts:

every Soviet historian, regardless of the work he was doing, had to become more concerned with the Party line than with the facts. It also meant that his final conclusions were foreordained by this line, and he had only to fit the facts to the prepared schemes to place them on the Procrustean bed of Party doctrine.⁴⁰

Shteppa described the process of transformation within the Soviet historical profession from Marxist historiography to history in the service of the Party, the transition to partiinost:

It started ... with the selection of topics.... This was followed by the requirement of a certain subjectivity of mood in the evaluation of the facts.... Finally, there came to be a factual denial of historical reality, except that which proceeded from the current tasks of Party policy. The truth became what the Party requires at any given moment, and this is what "Party Spirit" ... actually signifies.⁴¹

In a brilliant description of the psychological process of mixing truth and the Party line, Kolakowski has described the kind of schizophrenia that resulted from the creation of a belief that the many contradictory pronouncements of the Party were all simultaneously 'true'. He discusses it -- appropriately enough -- in the context of the well-known Stalinist practice of constantly rewriting

history to suit the new tactical needs of the Party. (His description of partiinost, while made in the context of Soviet citizens, is not without its applicability to Communists elsewhere -- as we shall see in our discussion of Ryerson).

Not only was the past constantly revised but -- an important feature of Stalinism -- everybody was supposed, on the one hand, to be aware of this and of the fairly simple way in which it was done, but, on the other, to say nothing about it on pain of the direct consequences. There were in the Soviet Union many other pseudo-secrets of this kind, i.e. matters that the whole population was intended to know about but never to mention (e.g., the labour camps -BM). . . . the government wanted people to be aware of certain facts of Soviet life while pretending to one another that no such facts existed. The object of the system was to create a dual consciousness. At public meetings, and even in private conversations, citizens were obliged to repeat in ritual fashion grotesque falsehoods about themselves, the world, and the Soviet Union, and at the same time to keep silent about things they knew very well, not only because they were terrorized but because the incessant repetition of falsehoods which they knew to be such made them accomplices in the campaign of lies inculcated by the party and the state. It was not the regime's intention people should literally believe the absurdities that were put about. . . . Perfect obedience required . . . that they should realize that the current ideology meant nothing in itself: any aspect of it could be altered or annulled by the supreme leader at any moment as he might see fit, and it would be everyone's duty to pretend that nothing had changed and that the ideology had been the same from everlasting. . . . In order to realize that the party ideology at any given time was neither more nor less than what the leader said it was, the citizen had to possess a dual consciousness: in public he professed adherence to the ideology as an unchanging catechism, while in private or semi-consciously he knew that it was a completely adaptable instrument in the party's hands, i.e. Stalin's. . . . it was this state of mind that the party sought to create and maintain in its own members. . . . They all knew what it was 'right' to say,

i.e. what was demanded of them, and in a curious way they confused this 'rightness' with truth. Truth, they knew, was a party matter, and therefore lies became true even if they contradicted the plain facts of experience. The condition of thus living in two separate worlds at once was one of the most remarkable achievements of the Stalinist system.⁴²

This peculiar form of schizophrenia was voluntarily embraced by Communist Party members around the world -- a state of all knowingness backed up by the most incredible naivete, all made possible by the systematic work of Party intellectuals labouring under the doctrine of partiinost.

Before examining Stalin's theory of the state, it is important to note that his pamphlet Marxism and Linguistics (1950) severely undermined the all-encompassing character of the base/superstructure model. Stalin gave the following description of the categories of phenomena contained in the concepts 'base' and 'superstructure':

The base is the economic structure of society at a given stage of its development. The superstructure consists of the political, legal, religious, artistic, and philosophical views of society and the political, legal, and other institutions corresponding to them. Every base has its own superstructure corresponding to it.⁴³

He then explained the position of language in the base/superstructure schema:

language differs radically from superstructure. Language is not a product of one or another base, old or new, within the given society, but of the whole course of the history of society, and the history of bases throughout centuries. It was created not by any class, but by all society, by

all the classes of society, by the efforts of generations. It was created for the satisfaction of the needs not only of one class, but of all the classes of society. ... Briefly, language cannot be ranked either among bases or among superstructures. Neither can it be ranked among "intermediate" phenomena between the base and superstructure, as such "intermediate" phenomena do not exist.⁴⁴

With these, Stalin created a third class of social phenomena outside the base and superstructure, provoking an international debate in the pages of Communist journals on the nature of the base/superstructure distinction,⁴⁵ and the limits of the model. Stalin emphasized that language undergoes slow gradual changes, rather than rapid upheavals, and that language is very closely tied to material-technical production:

The superstructure is not directly connected with production, with man's productive activity. It is connected with production only indirectly through the economy, through the base. The superstructure therefore does not reflect changes of development of the productive forces immediately and directly, but only after changes in the base, through the prism of changes wrought in the base by the changes in production. This means that the sphere of action of the superstructure is narrow and restricted. Language, on the contrary, is connected with man's productive activity directly, and not only with man's productive activity, but with all his other activities in all spheres of work, from production to the base and from the base to the superstructure. That is why language reflects changes in production immediately and directly, without waiting for changes in the base.⁴⁶

The identification of language with material-technical production was meant to emphasize the evolutionary and gradual nature of the changes in language. Gustav Wetter has argued that Stalin's sudden interest in linguistics was connected with the growth of

Russian nationalism, initiated in 1934.⁴⁷ Klaus Mahnert explains that the soviet bureaucracy promoted nationalism interaction to the severe class struggles in the Russian countryside between 1931 and 1933 (due to the collectivisation of agriculture), and the growth of the imminent threat of war with Nazi Germany.

If Bolshevism was not to be allowed to fall seriously behind in the struggle of world ideologies, the nationalist outlook must become a central instead of an incidental element of Bolshevik thought. ... So came the great volte face, the rediscovery of ... patriotism. ... in the same way as the magnifying of the nation and the magnifying of the national language represents an attempt to combat the centrifugal elements in the new class formation (of the Soviet Union -BM). As the introduction of payment in proportion to work done (Stalin's speech of June 23rd, 1931) began to have effect in the creation of poor and rich, upper and lower, to an extent regarded earlier as impossible in a "Socialist country", the Soviet leaders found themselves faced more and more with the problems familiar to every government in countries with differentiated social classes, namely class antagonism. Hence the emphasis laid again and again on the fact that a language is a "universal national" asset, that it belongs to the whole nation and not to particular classes. The language is to be the bond of union between all citizens.⁴⁸

Besides illustrating the systematic rehabilitation of nationalism undertaken by Stalin -- a point of some importance in understanding the position of Ryerson and other Canadian Communists on the national question -- these writings on linguistics were geared to undercut the idea that the class struggle is the motor force of history. Stalin wrote that:

Marxism holds that the transition of a language from an old quality to a new does not take place by way of an explosion ... but by the gradual accumulation of the elements of the new quality, and, hence, by the gradual dying away of the elements of the old quality.

It should be said in general for the benefit of comrades who have an infatuation for such explosions that the law of transition from an old quality to a new by means of an explosion is inapplicable not only to the history of the development of languages; it is not always applicable to some other social phenomena of a basal or superstructural character. It is compulsory for a society divided into hostile classes. But it is not at all compulsory for a society which has no hostile classes. In a period of eight to ten years we effected a transition in the agriculture of our country from the bourgeois individual peasant system to the socialist, collective farm system. This was a revolution which eliminated the old bourgeois economic system in the countryside and created a new, socialist system. But this revolution did not take place by means of an explosion, that is, by the overthrow of the existing power and the creation of a new power, but by a gradual transition from the old bourgeois system of the countryside to a new system. And we succeeded in doing this because it was a revolution from above, because the revolution was accomplished on the initiative of the existing power with the support of the overwhelming mass of the peasantry.⁴⁹

It is hard to imagine a more cynical display of the subordination of theory to the pragmatic politics of a new ruling class than this transparent attempt to justify the state capitalist industrialization of Russia, while denying legitimacy to any opposition currents that might dare to suggest the need for a revolution from below.⁵⁰

The writings on linguistics placed language in the same category as the productive forces and technology -- phenomena which supposedly develop gradually and in an

evolutionary manner. It then generalised that gradualism to the development of the social relations of production and superstructural phenomena under Soviet state capitalism. This major revision of Stalin's supposedly cosmic laws of motion of all matter has been explained by Jordan:

If the original doctrine of leaps were universally valid and revolution rather than evolution remained the vehicle of progressive change, Soviet society could not be spared the breach of continuity and the upheavals in its social and political advance. But Stalin no longer wanted to instigate change; he was anxious, above all, to preserve the Soviet social and political order and to protect it from change and destruction. The revision of the doctrine of leaps ... again confirms the view that Stalin's dialectical materialism had its roots in his political outlook.⁵¹

Before concluding our discussion of the base/super-structure problem, a comment is required on the instrumentalist theory of the state which is derived from Stalin's theory of historical materialism. Because Stalin placed the state, as a political institution, within the superstructure, the bourgeois state became an instrument of the class which dominated the social relations of distribution, i.e., the capitalist class. This view of the social relations involved in the state reduced the social forms of politics to relations under the immediate and direct control of the capitalist class. In this way, the content of political relations as class relations is highlighted, while their existence as distinct and separate forms of the class relations is accepted uncritically.

What both these theories have in common is "an inadequate theorization of the relation between the economic and the political as discrete forms of capitalist social relations".⁵² Both interpretations can lead to similarly reformist conclusions regarding the capitalist state: if the state is autonomous, then it is above the class struggle and neutral, whereas if the state is viewed as an instrument of one particular class, there is little reason to suppose that it might not equally be the instrument of another class, were it captured.

This contrasts with Marx's contention that the capitalist state was neither above the class struggle (as evident in his writings on the Paris Commune) nor simply the instrument of one class (as evident from his theoretical work on the phenomenon of Bonapartism). There is no such simple metaphysical formula in Marx's analyses of the state^{as those} we find in Stalinist Marxism. Marx deals both with the form and content of the state as a social relation. In his discussion of the Paris Commune, we find evidence of his recognition of the necessity to smash the class content of the old state (by transferring political power from one class to another), while at the same time Marx understood the need to make the transition from one form of political power by another (by putting the new state under the immediate control of the working class).

Because Stalin's Marxism understands the state only as an instrument of the ruling class, it forces the theorist to account for all the state's behaviour in terms of the immediate interests of the ruling class. The result is often the calamitous use of a conspiracy theory.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER VI

1. see Marx's "Preface" to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Charles H. Kerr, 1904, p. 11.
2. cited in Jordan's Karl Marx's Economy, Class and Social Revolution, Nelson, 1971, p. 92.
3. cited in Socialist Construction and Marxist Theory, by Phillip Corrigan, Harvie Ramsay and Derek Sayer, Macmillan, 1978.
4. from Karl Marx's Wage Labour and Capital, International Publishers, 1933, pp. 28-9.
5. see Marx's Method, by Derek Sayer, Harvester Press 1979, pp. 81-2.
6. *ibid.*, pp. 80-1.
7. *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
8. see Marx's Interpretation of History, by Melvin Rader, Oxford, 1979, p. 55.
9. cited in Rader, p. 31.
10. see Bertell Ollman's Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society, Cambridge University Press, 1971, p. 123.
11. Capital, Vol. III, Progress Publishers, 1966, p. 791.
12. Sayer, Marx's Method p. 82.
13. published by Monthly Review Press, 1977.
14. (see Ulmen's book review, in Telos #42, Winter 79-80.
15. see Draper's Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Vol. 1, State and Bureaucracy, Monthly Review, 1977, pages 428, 447, 454.
16. *ibid.*, p. 459.
17. *ibid.*, p. 553.
18. see Marx and Engels on the Paris Commune, Progress Publishers, 1971, pp. 71-2.

19. *ibid.*, p. 68.
20. *ibid.*, p. 75.
21. *ibid.*, pp. 157-7.
22. see Stalin's "Dialectical and Historical Materialism" in History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), International Publishers, 1939, p. 115.
23. *ibid.*, p. 115.
24. *ibid.*, p. 115.
25. *ibid.*, p. 117.
26. *ibid.*, p. 116.
27. *ibid.*, p. 117.
28. *ibid.*, p. 116.
29. see The Essential Stalin, ed. by Bruce Franklin, Anchor, 1972, p. 408.
30. see Nigel Harris' Beliefs in Society, Penguin, 1971, pp. 155-6.
31. see Jordan's The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism, Macmillan, 1967, p. 366.
32. *ibid.*, pp. 366-9.
33. cited in *ibid.*, p. 237.
34. *ibid.*, pp. 272-3.
35. *ibid.*, pp. 278-9.
36. *ibid.*, p. 280.
37. see Let History Judge, by Roy Medvedev, Vintage Books, 1973, p. 499.
38. Jordan, Evolution ..., p. 294.
39. see What is History?, by E.H. Carr, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 30.

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CHAPTER VII

THE PRODUCTIVE FORCES, AND THE DRIVING FORCE OF HISTORY

One of the most perplexing problems in the materialist conception of history advanced by Stalinist Marxism is the obvious contradiction between the source of social development indentified by Marx in the Communist Manifesto -- the class struggle -- and his claim in his "Preface" to A Critique of Political Economy that social development arises from the fettering of the productive forces by social relations of production. The Communist Manifesto says:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.¹

while the "Preface" says:

At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or -- what is but a legal expression for the same thing -- with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Thus begins an epoch of social revolution.²

Traditionally, and this is evident in Stalin's writings, the class struggle formulation has been ignored -- reserved only for ritual embellishment. Instead, we find almost constant and exclusive references to the forces of production/relations of production formulation. Recalling Stalin's conception of the productive forces as the material factors of production at work in the material technical labour process, it

is little wonder that he describes the contradictions which lead to social and historical development as follows:

changes and development (in history, -BM) always begins with changes and development of the productive forces, and, in the first place, with changes and development of the instruments of production. Productive forces are therefore the most mobile and revolutionary element of production. First the productive forces of society change and develop, and then, depending on these changes and in conformity with them, men's relations of production, their economic relations, change.³

Of course, Stalin makes all due allowances for the interaction of the relations of production back on the forces of production, but that does not alter his claim that whatever are the productive forces such must be the relations of production."⁴

Another feature of Stalin's concept of the forces of production is the spontaneous, indeed almost mystical nature of their perpetual growth:

the rise of new productive forces and of the relations of production corresponding to them does not take place separately from the old system ... but within the old system; it takes place not as a result of the deliberate and conscious activity of man, but spontaneously, unconsciously, independently of the will of man.⁵

To be sure, Stalin attributes the growth of the productive forces to the activity of men, but he does so in such terms as to make the growth of the productive forces inevitable.

Men are simply the instruments of the productive forces as they act to create new productive forces. However, Stalin does argue that

The spontaneous process of development (of the productive forces -BM) yields place to the conscious actions of men, peaceful development to violent upheaval....⁶

The transition from an old mode of production to a new one

takes place by means of the revolutionary overthrow of the old relations of production and the establishment of new relations of production. Up to a certain period the development of the productive forces and the changes in the realm of the relations of production proceed spontaneously, independently of the will of men. But that is only up to a certain moment, until the new and developing productive forces have reached a proper stage of maturity. After the new productive forces have matured, the existing relations of production and their upholders -- the ruling classes -- become that "insuperable" obstacle which can only be removed by the conscious action of the new classes, by the forcible acts of these classes, by revolution. Here there stands out in bold relief the tremendous role of new social ideas, of new political institutions, of a new political power, whose mission is to abolish by force the old relations of production.⁷

Premised upon the technicist conception of production, Stalin gives an account of the revolutionary transition from one mode of production to another which reproduces the dualism inherent in his theory. The moment of revolution occurs when the determinism of the productive forces give way to the voluntarism that is represented by the role of ideas (read the party).

Out of the conflict between the new productive forces and the old relations of production, out of the new economic demands of society there arise new social ideas; the new ideas organize and mobilize the masses; the masses become welded into a new political army, create a new revolutionary power, and make use of it to abolish by force the old system of relations of production, and firmly to establish the new system.⁸

This is a rather thinly disguised account of what Stalin believed transpired in Russia in 1917, and not a serious effort to analyze the nature of the transition from one mode of production to another in other historical circumstances.

Nevertheless, Stalin gave the bourgeois conception of production a new twist; while the social relations of distribution continued to be derived directly from the material-technical labour process, it was the increase in the scale of the latter (the spontaneous growth of the productive forces) that lead to the development of new forms of society. This technological determinism gives Stalin's Marxism a scientific veneer even though it is based on a moral critique of bourgeois relations of distribution, and a commitment to the preservation of the capitalist social relations of production.⁹

Of course, what Stalin's theory ignores is that the growth in the size and scale of capitalist production is not simply a spontaneous development taking place independently of the will of men. Rather, it has to be understood as the product of competing capitals operating within the existing social relations of production. Moreover, the expansion of capitalist production creates a class that has a potential to act in a manner which would alter not only the relations of distribution, but the relations of production which underlie them. In other words, the expansion of capitalist production is simultaneously the product of the existing relations of production, and their

expanded reproduction. The expansion of production is not simply a matter of adding more land, labour and capital considered exclusively as material factors of production.

Stalin's technological determinism and his employment of reductionist concepts of social relations and the labour process transforms his conception of history into a gradualist and evolutionary one. The notion that capitalism would simply grow over into socialism on the basis of the expansion of the material process of production, is part and parcel of seeing the existing social relations of capitalism as eternal. His idea of socialism pictured the material-technical process of production growing in scale to the point where it necessitated the replacement of private ownership of the material factors of production with state ownership. The alteration of the form of property would lead to changes in the forms of necessary and surplus labour appropriation without abolishing the latter. Because state capitalism represented no fundamental alteration of the underlying relations of production, the "socialist" labour process and the "socialist" state would remain vehicles of class exploitation and domination.

But Stalin's technicist understanding of the driving force of history was not restricted to the transition from capitalism to socialism. The same determinism of the 'productive forces' resulting in changes in the behaviour of the owners of the material factors of production, can be seen

in the following account of the transition from the slave mode of production to feudalism.

Further improvements in the smelting and working of iron; the spread of the iron plough and the loom; the further development of agriculture, horticulture, viniculture and dairying; the appearance of manufacturers alongside of the handicraft workshops -- such are the characteristic features of the state of the productive forces. The new productive forces demand that the labourer shall display some kind of initiative in production and an inclination for work.... The feudal lord therefore discards the slave, as a labourer who has no interest in work and is entirely without initiative, and prefers to deal with the serf, who has his own husbandry, implements of production, and a certain interest in work essential for the cultivation of the land and for the payment in kind of a part of his harvest to the feudal lord.... The basis of the relations of production ... is that the feudal lord owns the means of production and does not fully own the worker in production -- the serf.... Alongside of feudal ownership there exists individual ownership by the peasant and the handicraftsman of his implements of production and his private enterprise based on his personal labour.¹⁰

The picture is quite clear: the development of new instruments of production and new material-technical processes of production, considered in abstraction from any social relations whatsoever, necessitate new kinds of productive behaviour by the direct producers, and in turn by the exploiter. Entirely absent is any mention of the class struggle. The picture leaves no room for class struggle (or for that matter, even classes) resulting in new forms of the social relations of production. Any conflict that might occur in this idyllic picture would stem from disagreements between individual serfs

and individual lords over the size of the latter's exaction of surplus labour. Clarke has aptly summarized the point:

Developments in the forces of production (considered in the Stalinist sense -BM) produce a dislocation between forces of production and relations of distribution precipitating a change in the relations of distribution so that they correspond with the more developed forms of production.¹¹

That is the reason why theorists working within the Stalinist tradition typically periodise history on the basis of advances in the technical process of production or, failing that, on the basis of the social form of property rights or the forms of surplus appropriation and exploitation. Changes in the social relations of distribution are taken as incontrovertible evidence of changes in the material-technical labour process, and both together are deemed to be the essential features of any change in the mode of production.

Once the dialectical relation between the material and social sides of human production is severed, and they are forcibly re-linked in a technicist manner, then Stalin's technological determinism must ensue:

It is because the 'forces and relations of production' are seen as technical relations of production and social relations of distribution that the relation between them is seen as a relation alternately of correspondence and dislocation, and not a relation of contradiction. Hence the Marxist theory of history, which is based on the contradiction inherent in production in all class societies of being production of use values and production of relations of domination, is turned into a metaphysical philosophy of history in which the dialectic is an external law of history which governs the development of modes of production in a fixed succession by governing the progressive development of the forces of production which underlies it.¹²

Stalinist Marxism, among other theories, abolishes

the basis of the Marxist theory of history, which is the concept of production as a contradictory unity, and so eliminate(s) any source of changes internal to the structure they theorise. Insofar as historical change is not purely contingent, it has to be brought in from the outside, expressing a metaphysical principle of development, ... (the growth of -BM) technology....¹³

The Stalinist conception of historical materialism denies the role of subjective action in favour of stressing the laws of social development as generated by the movement of the productive forces and their interaction with the other objective factors of human existence, production relations and superstructural phenomena. Having eliminated human subjectivity and human labour as the driving forces of history, Stalinism replaces them with the claim that the moving force behind history is the contradictions that develop between two objective realities: productive forces and relations of production.¹⁴

The reification inherent in such an objectivist conception of history was evident in Stalin's Marxism and Linguistics where the economic base had all sorts of human intentions attributed to it. (Just ponder the following):

The base creates the superstructure precisely in order that it may serve it, that it may actively help it to take shape and consolidate itself, that it may actively strive for the elimination of the old, moribund base and its old superstructure. The superstructure has only to renounce its role of auxiliary, it has only to pass from a position of active defence of its base to one of indifference.

toward it, to adopt the same attitude to all classes, and it loses its virtue and ceases to be a superstructure. (All my emphasis -BM)

Here, two reified structures have become the agents of historical development, while human beings have simply disappeared. In this account, only the connection between objective structures is of interest (is the superstructure serving the interests of its base or not?). Thus Stalin succumbed to precisely that reification which was the object of Marx's greatest scorn, because it eliminated man from the center of history.¹⁶ This objectivism puts "pseudo-subjects in the place of really acting individuals."

Structural concepts are isolated from their concrete link with human 'subjects' and 'factors' of truly marvellous effectiveness, and the human subjects who alone deserve the name of factors are turned into 'products' of the abstractions thus raised to the power of factors.¹⁷

As Fleischer suggests there is very obviously "an ideological trend ... at work when subjectivity is so violently abstracted from itself in the name of an underlying objectivity."¹⁸

Such a view has the inevitable result of rendering history a non-human process in which the objective laws of movement subjugate and dominate the activity of human beings. Human beings are reduced to entities which are the products of the machinations of the terrible dance of the dialectic of the forces and relations of production. From the Marxist view that men act in a material and social context of which they are the product, we get beings that have been so conditioned

that they have lost all semblance of subjectivity and humanity. In other words, Stalinism reproduces on the level of theory precisely the social domination of capital over the working class which Marx sought to destroy.¹⁹

As early as The Holy Family, Marx made clear that history was more than simply an objectivistic and abstract process of interacting structures of forces and relations of production in the Stalinist sense. He wrote

History (or, we could substitute, "the contradiction between the forces and relations of production" -BM) does nothing, it "owns no tremendous wealth," it "fights no battles." Instead it is man, real, living man that does all this, owns and struggles; there is no such thing as "history" that uses man as its means in order to attain its ends -- as if it were a separate person -- for history is nothing but the activity of man pursuing his own ends.²⁰

In fact, Marx identifies the "forces of production and social relations" as really nothing more than "two different sides of the development of the social individual."²¹ He categorically rejected the efforts of those who sought to regard history as something other than the total outcome of the activities of individuals, making it a teleological process. As Fleischer puts it -- citing Marx --

If "later history is made the purpose of earlier history" and any "determination" is imposed upon history as a "distinctive aim," that is purely and simply a "speculative distortion."²³

Fleischer points the way out of the apparent difficulty that arises from Marx's view of history as both the outcome of the conscious activity of men and a process governed by "natural

laws."²⁴ Sidestepping the pitfalls of both objectivism and subjectivism, he explains that

the theorists's task is to avoid all exclusivity and to provide the link between the 'substantial' categories (producers as individuals, tools, products) with the 'dynamic' categories (activities, resultant processes) and the 'structural' and other categories (relations, correspondences, laws, trends).²⁵

In other words, the Marxist historian must be mindful of the subject/activity/object dialectic, and avoid positing history as simply the outcome of structural processes (like the interaction of forces and relations of production) behaving in a lawful manner as the Stalinist tradition does.

When Marx wrote in Capital that historical development was a "process of natural history," he was using the term "natural" in a negative sense.

In the introduction to Capital Marx states very laconically that he regards the development of economic forms as a "process of natural history" that has its "natural phases of development" and in its movement follows a "natural law"; "a law of economic movement," the discovery of which was the ultimate purpose of the work. ... Whenever Marx and Engels mention the course of previous history as resembling natural growth, they do so in a definitely critical spirit, implying it to be a state of affairs that must give way to one in which "men make their history with full consciousness themselves."²⁶

Thus, Marx was not attempting to establish a universal and positive conception of human history as a process conforming to natural cosmological laws; he was simply trying to make a statement about the character of capitalist society. Under

capitalism, men cease being individuals, their actions being nothing more than the personification of economic categories established by the existing class relations. The products and society which men produce become an independent and alien power over their human producers.²⁷ Thus, the lack of conscious and collective human control over the process of production reduces history to a "natural" process.

Oblivious to the subtleties of Marx's critique of capitalism as a form of society beyond the democratic control of the direct producers, the Stalinists seized upon Marx's comments about the "natural" quality of history, turning, perversion into a virtue.

To Marx ... the quality of natural growth hitherto inherent in the social process, and of the capitalist social process in particular, lay above all in the circumstances that men, in what they were and what they did, did not autonomously develop their own potentialities but were subjected or were exposed to an external factor, and that they were affected in a manner that was totally external to them by what others, their predecessors or contemporaries, had set in train. ... most men were and remained mere products of traditional or existing social relations and merely carried out functions characteristic of those relations; their social behaviour followed the pattern of those relations and was, therefore, calculable like a natural physical process.²⁸

By contrast with Stalin's identification of the driving force of history with the spontaneous development of material technical production, Marx locates it in the labouring activity of human beings. But this in no way undermines the class

struggle and forces of production/relations of production formulations found in Marx's Communist Manifesto and his "Preface".

To dissolve the apparent problem, we need only examine Marx's concept of "productive forces" in some detail, discovering in the process that the concept has a much wider meaning than simply the instruments of production, the material labour process, or even technology. In the Results of the Immediate Process of Production, Marx writes,

The social productive forces of labour, or the productive forces of directly social, socialised (i.e. collective) labour come into being through co-operation, division of labour within the workshop, the use of machinery, and in general the transformation of production by the conscious use of the sciences, of mechanics, chemistry, etc. for specific ends, technology, etc. and similarly, through the enormous increase of scale corresponding to such developments (for it is only socialised labour that is capable of applying the general products of human development, such as mathematics, to the immediate process of production....). This entire development of the productive forces of socialized labour (in contrast to the more or less isolated labour of individuals), and together with it the use of science (the general product of social development), in the immediate process of production, takes the form of the productive power of capital. It does not appear as the productive power of labour... (nor -BM) does it appear as the productive power either of the individual worker or of the workers joined together in the process of production.²⁹

In this description of the forces of capitalist production Marx includes the social relations of work and co-operation associated with the actual labour process, in addition to the use of highly developed material and social instruments of

production (e.g., machinery and mechanics) by labour. Central to Marx's very concept of productive forces is the idea that the social relations of co-operation between direct producers, and indeed other social relations, may be productive forces, just as much as knowledge or the instruments of production.

In the German Ideology, Marx wrote:

The production of life ... appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as a natural, on the other hand as a social relationship. By social we understand the cooperation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end. It follows from this that a certain mode of production ... is always combined with a certain mode of cooperation, or social stage, and this mode of cooperation is itself a 'productive force'.³⁰

Here Marx identifies co-operation in broad terms as the social form of human production, the social relations men enter into in the reproduction of their lives. But he also refers to the forms which co-operation within the labour process adopt, the social relations of the immediate process of production (as opposed to the total circuit of production, including distribution and exchange). For example, in Capital, we find the following:

Cooperation in the labour process, such as we find it at the beginning of human civilization, among hunting peoples or, say, as a predominant feature of the agriculture of Indian communities, is based on the one hand on the common ownership of the conditions of production, and on the other hand on the fact that in those cases the individual has little torn himself free from the umbilical cord of his tribe.... Both of these characteristics distinguish this form of co-operation from capitalist co-operation. The sporadic application of co-operation on a large scale in ancient times, in the Middle Ages, and in modern

colonies, rests on direct relations of domination and servitude, in most cases on slavery. As against this, the capitalist form presupposes from the outset the free wage labourer who sells his labour power to capital.³¹

This passage not only shows that co-operation in the labour process is one of the forms adopted by the social relations of production, but that it is a form which has a distinct historical content in different modes of production. Thus, co-operation in the Middle Ages, for example, rests on the class relations of domination and servitude, while co-operation in the capitalist mode of production presupposes the class relation between wage labour and capital. In Capital Marx argues that the special quality of combined and cooperative human labour is not simply a social relation, but a social force:

When numerous workers work together side by side in accordance with a plan, whether in the same process, or in different but connected processes, this form of labour is called co-operation. Just as the offensive power of a squadron of cavalry, or the defensive power of an infantry regiment, is essentially different from the sum of the offensive or defensive powers of the individual soldiers taken separately, so the sum total of the mechanical forces exerted by isolated workers differs from the social force that is developed when many hands co-operate in the same undivided operation.... In such cases the effect of the combined labour could either not be produced at all by isolated individual labour, or it could be produced only by a great expenditure of time, or on a very dwarf-like scale. Not only do we have here an increase in the productive power of the individual, by means of co-operation, but the creation of a new productive power, which is intrinsically a collective one.³²

Thus, in Marx's writings, the concept 'productive forces' refers not only to the material instruments of production like

machines, and not only to the general mental 'instruments' of production like mathematics and science, but also to those social powers of human production that arise when the subject (the direct producer) is a collective one.

However, the social form of co-operation is always a form of the total social relations of production. Therefore, the form of co-operation within a "naturally evolved society" -- i.e., in a society where man does not consciously and collectively decide the course of production, as in class society -- simply assists in the reproduction of a social and material "alien power" which enslaves him.

This fixation of social activity, this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into a material power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now. The social power, i.e., the multiplied productive force, which arises through the co-operation of different individuals as it is caused by the division of labour, appears to these individuals, since their co-operation is not voluntary but has come about naturally, not as their own united power, but as an alien force existing outside them of the origin and goal of which they are ignorant, which they thus are no longer able to control, which on the contrary passes through a peculiar series of phases and stages independent of the will and the action of man, nay even being the prime governor of these.³³

It is in this sense that the material and social forces of production are the driving force of history. Stalin's misconception arose from a reductionist conception of the productive forces as simply the instruments of production and people -- considered as muscle and bones with a particular level of skill (see page 74 above). For Marx, the material and the social sides of

production always interpenetrate, and none of his concepts demonstrates that better than the concept of 'productive forces'.

Sayer argues not only that social relations may be productive forces (as suggested in Marx's examples of state autonomization discussed above) but that social relations may also "impose and constitute indispensable conditions for the development and utilisation of particular forms of technology".³⁶ Using Marx's discussion of the formal and real subsumption of labour under capital, Sayer explains that, for Marx, even the combination of formally independent producers as wage labourers within the workplace of a single capitalist gives rise to "a new power, namely, the collective power of the masses". As Marx put it,

The special productive power of the combined working day is, under all circumstances, the social productive power of labour, or the productive power of social labour. This power is due to co-operation itself.³⁷

The efforts of the bourgeois economists to ascribe this productive power of the combined working class to the means of production (reminiscent of Stalin's efforts to do likewise) were denounced by Marx as examples of fetishism. Furthermore, this formal subsumption of labour to capital paves the way for the real subsumption of labour, in which the labour process is dramatically revolutionized by capital through the introduction of technology.³⁸ In this case, it is clear, not

only that the wage labour relation is a prerequisite for the development of the productive forces, but that intra-capitalist competition (i.e., a social relation) plays a crucial role.

This discussion lays the basis for explaining the role of the 'productive forces' in Marx's analysis of capitalist development. For example, in the transition from feudalism to capitalism,

the relevant contradiction lies not between technology and social relations (both conceived in the reduced sense as the Stalinists do -BM) simpliciter but between one set of emergent production relations, which both constitute a productive force in their own right and are capable of sustaining a superior technology, and another, "within the framework of which they have operated hitherto".³⁹

Thus, the social productive forces inherent in the collectivized nature of capitalist work form the basis of an emergent set of social relations that can constitute the embryo of a new mode of production -- socialism, based on workers' control in the labour process and over social relations.

It is only when we understand productive forces in this way, that the apparent contradiction between the forces of production/relations of production argument about historical development coincides with the insistence that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of the class struggles". Indeed, in the German Ideology Marx explains that the contradiction between the forces and relations of

production may take a number of forms:

The contradiction between the productive forces and the form of intercourse ... has occurred several times in past history (and -BM) ... on each occasion burst out in a revolution, taking on at the same time various subsidiary forms, such as all embracing collisions of various classes, contradictions of consciousness, battle of ideas, political struggle, etc. ... Thus all collisions in history have their origin, according to our view, in the contradiction between the productive forces and the form of intercourse.⁴⁰

Marx's concept of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production preserves the internal relation between the technical dimension of human production and the social dimension. As Sayer points out, "having recognised production itself as irreducibly both material and social ... it makes no sense whatsoever to define the forces through which it is effected in a manner that excludes phenomena of either kind."⁴¹ This position is reflected in Marx's comment that

Man himself is the basis of his material production, as of any other production that he carries on. All circumstances, therefore, which affect man, the subject of production, more or less modify all his functions and activities, and therefore too his functions and activities as the creator of material wealth.... In this respect it can in fact be shown that all human relations and functions, however and in whatever form they may appear, influence material production and have a more or less decisive influence upon it.⁴²

If society's productive forces consist of the productive skills and abilities that human beings have taken together with the objective social and material conditions in existence which enable those skills and abilities to be utilized, then

together these resources, subjective abilities and objective enabling conditions -- determine society's productive capacities: what things or states of affairs can be produced, how and with what side effects, and in what quantity combinations. Evolution of society's productive forces is precisely the evolution of this set of resources.⁴³

There are, of course, many different paths which that evolution could take. Under capitalism the productive forces are developed in keeping with the demands of the existing social relations of production: they channel all resources toward enabling the reduction of labour time per unit of output and toward legitimizing and protecting the existing power of capital. In the wake of a successful workers' revolution those social productive forces of the working class could be directed toward different priorities.

If a path of development becomes important which cannot be pursued within capitalist relations of production but can be pursued within another set of production relations, then the productive forces are fettered within capitalism.⁴⁴

Upon this understanding, it would be apparent that for Marx the contradiction between the forces and relations of production is by no means an eternal law of all history, nor even a law for all pre-communist modes of production. His note to himself in the "Introduction" to the Grundrisse is instructive; it reads

Notabene in regard to points to be mentioned here and not to be forgotten: ... Dialectic of the concepts productive force ... and relation of production, a dialectic whose boundaries are to be determined....⁴⁵

Marx did not necessarily want to explain all transitions from one mode of production to another by means of a single metaphysical law of the inevitability of a contradiction between the forces and relations of production. Rather, the dialectic of forces and relations of production was limited to his study of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and to the eventual transition from the latter to socialism. Marx evidently felt under no compulsion to explain the transition from pre-feudal modes of production to feudalism on the same basis, as is only too evident in the Grundrisse. As many authors have pointed out, Marx's discussion of the Asiatic mode of production is an analysis of a form of society that was incapable of internally generating such a contradiction.⁴⁶ Marx seems to restrict the use of the forces and relations of production formulation to those modes of production in which labour productivity may be systematically developed because of the existing class relations.

Within the capitalist mode of production, the enormous social power of the collective labour of the working class is subjected to the control and power of

capital. The labouring activity of workers produces and reproduces the material and social conditions necessary for both its own and capital's continued existence. In that sense, it is the working class, through its labouring activity, which

persistently develops all the contradiction inherent in the expanded reproduction of capital, under the compulsion and domination of capital.⁴⁷

As capital expands, it passes from a labour process characterized by the formal subsumption of labour to the real subsumption of labour, and thereby compounds the contradictions. As Marx explains,

with the development of the specifically capitalist mode of production (i.e., with the real subsumption of labour - BM), it is not only these directly material things (i.e., the material means of production - BM) ... that get up on their hind legs to the labourer and confront him as "capital", but (also) the forms of socially developed labour -- co-operation, manufacture (as a form of the division of labour), the factory (as a form of social labour organised on machinery as its material basis) -- all these appear as forms of the development of capital, and therefore the productive powers of labour built up on these forms of social labour -- consequently also science and the forces of nature -- appear as productive forces of capital.⁴⁸

Elsewhere, Marx explained that under capitalism

the productive forces appear as a world for themselves, quite independent of and divorced from the individuals, alongside the individuals; the reason for this is that the individuals, whose forces they are, exist split up and in opposition to one another, whilst on the other hand, these forces are only real forces in the intercourse and association of these individuals. ... we have a totality of productive forces, which have, as it were, taken on a material form and are for the individuals themselves no longer the forces of the individuals but of private property....⁴⁹

In the same way that the social character of value producing labour expresses itself as a property of the material use values

of that labour, the social relations of capitalist production also acquire a material technical shape as the machinery, the factory and even co-operative labour itself.

The fact that capital must give itself a material technical shape by expressing itself in the specific design of the labour process (means that -BM) ... a social relation of production assumes the form of certain natural properties and processes. ... the consequence is ... a type of fetishism: the forces of production (e.g., co-operation, division of labour, machinery, science) appear as such to have the power to subjugate living labour.. The peculiar exploitation of living labour by dead labour which is capital appears to be due ... to certain eternal features of the production process.... 50

But the co-operative form of labour in the capitalist mode of production only reproduces the existing class relations, so long as individuals remain alienated from their own collective social power. The social power inherent in their co-operative production may also be mobilized to overturn the existing class relations. It is in this sense that the productive forces of capitalism can destroy the existing social relations of production. Such was the view developed by Marx in The Poverty of Philosophy. The capitalist concentration of workers in factories results in the creation of unions "which serve as ramparts for the workers in their struggles with the employers".

Large scale industry concentrates in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance.... The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as

against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle ... this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. ... For the oppressed class to be able to emancipate itself it is necessary that the productive powers already acquired and the existing social relations should no longer be capable of existing side by side. Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself.⁵¹

In this quote, Marx touches upon the second of his two basic principles of working class revolution (the first is the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as discussed in connection with the Paris Commune), the need for the working class to emancipate itself through an extended period of class struggle. Marx was only too aware that

Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution: this revolution is necessary ... not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.⁵²

Throughout the history of class society, there have been class struggles. But pre-capitalist popular rebellions usually resulted in the replacement of one ruling class by another, as the 'underclasses' acted "as a battering ram to break down the old system but not as a force fit to build a new one in its own name".⁵³ Even before the rise of capitalism and the working class, history had demonstrated that ruling classes perceived the danger that a mobilized underclass might

not easily be pacified. But in the absence of a vision of a new social order, the victory of these underclasses could only result in chaos.⁵⁴

With the working class, comes the possibility that the dominated and exploited class can actually free itself. The very life conditions of working class people -- the material and social conditions under which they work and relate to society -- create the possibility for them to assume control over society and its productive capacities. The development of capitalism eliminates the material backwardness of all previous society, by dramatically increasing the material and social productivity of human labour power (i.e., the forces of production). At the same time, capitalism organises and disciplines the working class in a manner which enables it to generate the idea of socialism. The working class is disciplined and collectivised by the capitalist factory system in a gigantic social division of labour which sensitizes it to the elaborate interdependence of all the direct producers. The same social division of labour enables class conscious workers to conceive of a new social order⁵⁵ which encompasses all society and which is run collectively by organs of workers' direct democracy. It is this understanding of the working class as the first self conscious agent of historical change that lead Engels to explain in one of the many Prefaces to the Communist Manifesto, that our notion, from the very

beginning, was that 'the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself'...⁵⁶

This distinctive conception of the working class as the force producing the new social order of socialism, as the social power creating socialism from below, stands in sharp contrast to Stalin's "revolution from above", under the careful control of an all powerful and elite party. It is here that the theory of historical materialism intersects with the practical politics of revolution in both the work of Marx and Stalin, and it is on this point that the contrast between the two is so obvious. Stalin's theory of socialism-from-above stems immediately from the dualism inherent in all his theory, and especially that dichotomy between the determinism which keeps the working class subordinate, and the freedom which enables the Stalinist party to govern or to lead. This is a view of socialism achieved at the hands of an all powerful ruling class, a view in which the forms of property and the conditions of revenue acquisition change, while the substance of class relations in the state and the labour process remains the same.

Ultimately, the greatest and most telling contrast between Marx and Stalin arises in their contrasting conceptions of socialism, since the vision of a new social order cannot be separated either from the means to achieve it or an understanding of the character of the prevailing society. Raya

Dunayevskaya summarizes Marx's hostility to the social order typical of state capitalist Russia in this way:

As Marx put it in his earlier writings, as long as there exist "powers over individuals", "private property must exist". To Marx, private property is the power to dispose of the labour of others. That is why he so adamantly insisted that to make "society" the owner, but to leave the alienated labour alone, is to create "an abstract capitalist." Yet what is essential is that it is power, power to dispose, or share in the disposal, of the labour of others.

Thirty years before Marx developed his economic theories in full, and could see in dim outline that the growth of capital might lead to its concentration in the "hands of one single capitalist," Marx insisted that the abolition of private property means a new way of life, a new social order only if "freely associated individuals," and not abstract "society," become the masters of the socialized means of production. 57

The simple minded notion that nationalization of property will eliminate the anarchy that characterizes capitalism is a transparent attempt to apply the logic of the material-technical process of capitalist production to the level of society. In other words, an effort to apply the technical division of labour to society as a whole. It mistakes the alteration of a few social forms -- those characteristic of the capitalist social relations of distribution, namely the forms of 'private' property ownership/revenue acquisition (in the form of 'profit') for an elimination of the contradictions inherent in the underlying capitalist relations of production. Making a state capitalist alteration in the relations of distribution in no way undermines the class struggle as the driving force of history, and certainly enhances the strength of the social

forces of production, which are the harbinger of a new mode of production.

Dunayevskaya explains that despite Marx's unfamiliarity with the Stalinist advocates of 20th century state capitalism, he criticized the Utopian socialists for similar views, and

for their total preoccupation with the question of private property. Despite their opposition to it, Marx said, their view was "merely the logical expression of private property." That is to say, there was really no fundamental difference between the exponents of private property and those who were opposed to it but were willing to let the mode of labour remain what it was. Of course, said Marx, the product the worker creates is alienated from him, becomes the property of another, the capitalist.... (But -BM) the basic contradictions of capitalism cannot be overcome until what is ... the cause of all other contradictions -- alienated labour -- is overcome: "In the alienation of the object of labour is only crystallized the alienation, the estrangement, in the very activity of labour". This is the essence of all that is perverse in capitalism.⁵⁸

In other words, a mere change in the sphere of distribution would mean little if the labour process, the state, and all the other social relations of production were not subordinated to the direct and democratic control of the associated producers. By calling for the abolition of private property, Marx did not mean simply the abolition of a single property form. That is what accounts for his comment that

to define bourgeois property is nothing less than to give an exposition of bourgeois production. To try to give a definition of property as of an independent relation, a category apart -- an abstract external ideal -- can be nothing but an illusion of metaphysics or jurisprudence.⁵⁹

"Private" property for Marx meant simply the peculiarly capitalist social form in which production was "not social", not under the collective control of the associated producers.⁶⁰

Marx's concept of the communist mode of production turns on the notion of democratic control by the associated producers, rather than mere property ownership.

Freedom ... can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of nature....⁶¹

Communism was to be the very opposite of mastering the laws of motion of all history in order to regulate society. For Marx, communism meant the abolition of the 'natural' laws of capitalist development and the de-fetishization of the world to render the social relations of the associated producers transparent. As Marx explained,

The religious reflections of the real world can...vanish only when the practical relations of everyday life between man and man, man and nature, generally present themselves in a transparent and rational form. The veil is not removed from the countenance of the social-life process, i.e., the process of material production, until it becomes production by freely associated men, and stands under their conscious and planned control. 62

The preceding discussion has been lengthy but necessary. The sharp contrast between Marx's materialist conception of history, and Stalin's subsequent version of it provides the perfect contrast for identifying the roots of Ryerson's theoretical and methodological premises. For the reader concerned that my presentation may have avoided some element of continuity between Marx and Stalin, I have appended a discussion of the origins of the technicist version of Marxism in the work of Engels and the theorists of the Second International.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER VII

1. see the Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels, Penguin, 1968, p. 79.
2. see the Preface to Marx's A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Charles H. Kerr, 1904, p. 12; also see "The Consistency of Historical Materialism" by Richard Miller, in Marx, Justice and History, ed. by Marshall Cohen, et al., Princeton University Press, 1980.
3. see Stalin's "Dialectical and Historical Materialism", in History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), International Publishers, 1939, pp. 121-122.
4. *ibid.*, p. 122.
5. *ibid.*, p. 128.
6. *ibid.*, p. 130.
7. *ibid.*, pp. 129-130.
8. *ibid.*, p. 130.
9. see Simon Clarke's "Althusserian Marxism" in One Dimensional Marxism, Allison and Busby, 1980, p. 18.
10. see Stalin's "Dialectical and ...", pp. 124-135.
11. see Simon Clarke's "Marxism, Sociology and Poulantzas' Theory of the State," in Capital and Class, #2, 1977, p. 2.
12. *ibid.*
13. *ibid.*, pp. 21-22.
14. see Helmut Fleischer's Marxism and History, Allen Lane the Penguin Press, 1973, p. 139.
15. Franklin, pp. 408-409.
16. Fleischer, p. 42.
17. Fleischer, p. 42.
18. *ibid.*
19. *ibid.*, p. 44.

20. see Marx-Engels Collected Works, Vol. IV, International Publishers, 1975, page 94.

21. see Marx's Grundrisse, Vintage Books, 1973, p. 706.

23. Fleischer, p. 17.

24. *ibid.*, p. 29.

25. *ibid.*, p. 30.

26. *ibid.*, p. 33.

27. *ibid.*, pp. 32-3.

28. *ibid.*, p. 34.

29. see Marx's Capital, Vol. I, Vintage Books, 1977, p. 1024.

30. see The German Ideology, by Marx and Engels, Progress, 1964, p. 49; also see the quotes from Marx in Fleischer, pp. 21-22.

31. see Capital, Vol. I, p. 452.

32. *ibid.*, p. 443.

33. German Ideology, pp. 53-4.

36. see Derek Sayer's Marx's Method, Harvester Press, 1979, p. 84.

37. cited in *ibid.*, pp. 85-6.

38. *ibid.*

39. *ibid.*, p. 87.

40. German Ideology, p. 83.

41. Sayer, p. 87.

42. cited in *ibid.*

43. see Habermas and Marxism: An Appraisal, by Julius Sensat, Jr., Sage, 1979, p. 112.

44. *ibid.*, p. 113.

45. Grundrisse, p. 109.

PART III - RYERSON AND THE STALINIST
DISTORTION OF MARXISM

CHAPTER VIII

RYERSON AND STALINIST PHILOSOPHY: "A WORLD TO WIN"

During World War II, Communist Party efforts to defend the Soviet Union translated into support for anti-working class measures within Canada. They advocated a no-strike pledge¹ and criticized the CCF for advocating socialism as an immediate goal because it would undermine the war effort, and therefore the defence of the Soviet Union. CCF calls for the conscription of wealth were denounced by the Communists because they "would bring about violent social conflict" -- a thing to be avoided. Part of the swing to the right was an abandonment of the idea that capitalism was a mode of production plagued by fundamental contradictions:

In public the Communists declared that unemployment under capitalism need not take place, provided those in power adopted the proposals put forward by the Communists in the LPP program and manifesto for the 1945 federal election.²

During the 1945 Federal Election, Communist Party literature argued that the real issue in the election was not socialism versus capitalism, but

to decide whether we can organize government policy in such a way as to maintain a high level of production and purchasing power in accordance with people's needs and economic interests.³

CCF rejections of Communist Party efforts to affiliate with the social democrats, resulted in Communist efforts to create a

"Liberal Labor Coalition" between themselves and the Liberal party, during the final stages of the war. Mackenzie King and the federal cabinet were praised, and the Communist leader, Tim Buck, was quoted as saying that the philosophy of the Liberal party approximated what "used to be known as Communism".

In subsequent party debate over the dangers of "Browderism" -- the label used to describe wartime efforts of the CP in the United States to disband the Party and replace it with an association, under the leadership of Earl Browder -- leaders of the Canadian party admitted to having erred by claiming that capitalist business cycles could be avoided. They also conceded that the slogan of the "Liberal-Labor Coalition" was liable to misrepresentation, and that revisionist tendencies existed with the CPC.⁴

When Stalin dissolved the Comintern in 1943, as a sign of faith to his new allies in the West, Browder took this as a sign that Communists in the West should do likewise by dissolving their respective parties and moving closer to the mainstream of national political life. In his all out effort to win the war, Browder carried the Comintern line -- class collaboration -- to its logical conclusion:

We have to win this war under the capitalist system.... Therefore we have to find out how to make the capitalist system work ... we have to help the capitalists to learn how to run their own system under war conditions We will postpone until some indefinite post-war period the basic problems of capitalism.... (National

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unity in the US -BM) is above all a problem of adjusting class interests without the severe struggle by which this has usually been accomplished.... In the United States national unity can be achieved only through compromise between the conflicting interests, demands and aspirations of various class groupings.⁵

By May of 1944, Browder had dissolved the CPUSA in favour of a communist political-education association.

In 1944 and 1945, it became apparent to Stalin and the Soviet leaders that the post-war world would be split between two power blocs, headed by the United States and the Soviet Union. In anticipation,

the Kremlin began to prepare another change of line, this time a return to militant tactics as a means of threatening and perhaps destroying the strength of the Western powers. A political reconversion of such scope raised the possibility that some Communist leaders, too closely associated with the wartime slogans of "national unity" might have to be dismissed.⁶

The sacrificial lamb chosen was Browder in the American Communist Party -- the man who had spoken of the post-war world as a period of harmony between the United States and the Soviet Union.⁷ The vehicle of his downfall was a campaign of criticism directed against Browder by a trusted leader in the French CP. Within two months Browder was replaced as party leader, and within a year he had been expelled.

It was in the aftermath of the debate over Browderism and revisionism within the Party that Ryerson wrote his third book: A World to Win: An Introduction to the Science of Socialism.

Published in late 1946, the 137-page book was part of an effort to upgrade the theoretical understanding of Party members. It also coincided with a CPC campaign surrounding the 100th anniversary of Marxism -- of which more will be said later. The book was immensely popular among Canadian Communists, going through three printings between 1946 and 1950. It was sold through "mass sales in the shops and the neighbourhoods," and was used as a basis for study groups among Party members. An article in Club Life, (a Communist periodical) asked "How Are You Using A World to Win?", and explained that the short book was

designed as a bridge to the basic study of the classics -- leading both to them, and from them to the application of their teachings to the problems of struggle in Canada. ... the Canadian data it contains will help provide the concreteness that is needed in any Marxist study by Canadian workers.⁸

Following the downfall of Earl Browder, a National Committee meeting of the LPP had decided "to carry through a deep-going campaign of education under the slogan 'Strengthen the mastery of Party policy on the basis of better mastery of the foundations of Marxism-Leninism'." As part of that campaign, Ryerson was given the responsibility of initiating a Dominion Training School. In addition, to this new training program, the National Education Department of the LPP (of which Ryerson was the head) was charged with preparing "for publication a series of popular educational pamphlets on the elements of Scientific Socialism, illustrated by Canadian data, to be used

in conjunction with classical Marxist works."¹⁰ The series of pamphlets never appeared; instead, Ryerson wrote A World to Win as a popularized explanation of the fundamentals of Marxism.

Tim Buck commented that the purpose of this book was

to provide the membership in every club (the same as a party cell -BM) with the actual material which would enable any rank and file comrade to lead a class of his fellow comrades in studying Canada and the application of Marxism to Canada.¹¹

Buck's comment illustrated a new preoccupation among Canadian communists -- the application of marxist theory to Canadian history and politics. Because Canadian communists had been so uncritical of Browder's efforts to liquidate the American Communist party on behalf of the war effort, the furor created when Browder was denounced by his own party led Canadian communists to push the need for greater theoretical clarity. Thus, in 1946, Buck wrote

It is true that during the war ... we were influenced by the revisionist theories developed by Earl Browder. (However -BM) ... in the decisions we made and in the directives given to the party membership ... the more crass and vulgar distortions of Marxism perpetrated by Earl Browder were rejected, although we rejected them on the inadequate ground that, while they might be justified in the United States, there were no conditions which justified them in Canada. We failed to recognize their non-Marxist character and therefore failed to develop a struggle against them as we should have done. The fight in Canada over Browder's revisionism, and to overcome the uncritical attitude towards theoretical questions which caused us not to challenge it, is the essence of our struggle to extend and raise the level of our study of Marxism-Leninism throughout our movement.¹²

The disputes about Browderism within the upper echelons of the party meant a renewed commitment to interpret the Moscow line more carefully, and Ryerson was to be in the forefront of insuring that happened. The frequent calls to defend "Marxist-Leninist" orthodoxy meant greater political responsibilities for those -- like Ryerson -- who championed the cause of "Marxist-Leninist" theory as a solution to the Party's ills. In a 1946 article, Ryerson affirmed his loyalty to the leadership of Buck -- despite the difficulties with revisionism -- and exhibited an almost religious fervour about the need to purify party doctrine as a solution to the evils of Browderism:

Our Marxist-Leninist science is our most precious possession; and it must be said that through neglect, passiveness and dozing on the theoretical front, we allowed our work to be damaged by the influence of revisionism.... (We -BM) need to strengthen our conscious fight for the purity of Marxist-Leninist science, and raise in the whole Party the level of Communist understanding.... In the name of safeguarding the purity of theory, the attempt is made -- with however good intentions -- to gird our theory in ... an iron "chastity belt".... We need to fight for the purity of our theory, but not that way. Communists place the center of gravity ... not in "the superficial recognition of Marxism", but in "its realization, its application in practical life".... This is ... the advice of ... the greatest living master of creative Marxism: Stalin.¹³

Before turning to a detailed discussion of A World to Win (a crucial book, considering its status as Ryerson's most explicitly theoretical, and therefore most transparently Stalinist work) a greater appreciation of the climate of intellectual servility in the CPC is needed.

Stalin as the Supreme Interpreter of Marxism

During the thirties, Canadian Communists cut their theoretical teeth on Stalin's Foundations of Leninism. A 1935 article in the CPC's journal Communist Review stated that

every party member has a special duty ... to master and arm himself with the special weapon of Leninism.... Every Member Must Read and Study the "Foundations of Leninism." The remaining winter months (the article appeared in the December/January issue -BM) must be fully utilized to this purpose. ... By spring there must not be a single member of our party who has not read and studied at least the Foundations of Leninism.... 14.

With the 1938 publication of the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (bolsheviks) and the little essay by Stalin on "Dialectical and Historical Materialism", all education and theory in the CPC revolved around it as the basic statement of Marxism. In a 1939 newspaper article, Ryerson had reviewed the book, praising it in the highest terms:

La publication de cette histoire ... constitue un événement politique de la plus grande portée. Il a son importance ... car ... toute la doctrine du socialisme scientifique y trouve son exposition en termes précis, populaires, plein de substance.¹⁵

But Ryerson did not stop merely with praising Stalin's writings. Like all the leaders of the CPC he revelled in what would later be called the "cult of personality" surrounding Stalin. Being the Party's most renowned intellectual did not make him immune to this odious practice. Thus, for example (and there are many more) in commemoration of Stalin's 70th birthday (in 1949), Ryerson wrote an extremely laudatory essay

on Stalin's contributions to the Communist tradition. Besides the usual praise for Stalin as supreme and infallible leader, Ryerson specifically commented on his theoretical writings:

In his work, The Foundations of Leninism... Stalin armed the party and the world communist movement.... The Foundations provided a handbook of theory and practice in the struggle for socialism.

In the History of the CPSU(B) Stalin has provided the working class with "an exposition and generalization of the vast historical experience of the Communist Party...." From it can be learned the essence of Marxism: its revolutionary method. In the section on dialectical and historical materialism is summed up the whole of working class scientific philosophy.... it presents the fundamentals of the Leninist theory, enriched and developed by Stalin....

And, Ryerson outlined Stalin's major theoretical contributions as follows:

the theory of the party as the vanguard. The party as the center and organization of leadership; its character as the highest form of class organization of the proletariat; the principles of organization of a Communist Party, and in the first place unity of will, discipline, democratic centralism; the law of development of the Party, of criticism and self-criticism and the ceaseless struggle against the alien pressures of opportunism; the relation of theory to the party, and the indispensable struggle for the mastery of theory -- on all of these questions the leader of the Bolshevik party has made mighty contributions to the theory and practice of Communism.¹⁶

The acceptance of Stalin's theories and pronouncements (and, for that matter, those of Stalin's designated theoretical authorities within the Soviet Union) by Ryerson was total.

Every speech made by Stalin, each of his new writings, and every theoretical innovation made by one of his associates was pored

over very carefully by the leadership of the CPC. For example, the January 1953 issue of NAM ran a short statement under the title "On the 19th Congress and Stalin's New Work." Part of the statement read:

The NEC (i.e., the National Executive Committee - of which Ryerson was a member -BM) greets the new work of genius of Comrade Stalin, Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R., as of profound importance for the work and education of Communists and calls upon the Party membership to study it energetically in the coming period.

The NEC decides that the educational work of the LPP for the year 1953 shall concentrate on the study of the Draft Program of the LPP, the new work of Comrade Stalin, Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R., the concluding speech of Comrade Stalin at the 19th Congress and the Reports of the 19th Congress of the CPSU.¹⁷

The NEC will take measures to ensure that the world historic significance of the 19th Congress, and the writings of Comrade Stalin, will be made known through meetings, lectures, discussions, the wide sale of the pamphlets containing these documents, and articles in the press....

The NEC has taken a number of practical decisions with a view to immediately implementing this resolution. The NEC will continue its study of the 19th Congress and the work of Comrade Stalin.

That same month, Norman Freed of the National Education Department prepared a 16 page pamphlet entitled Study Course on J.V.

Stalin's Classical Work: "Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.".¹⁸ With that, the Communist Party's year of study on

Stalin's -- as it turned out -- last writings could begin.

Such mindless and uncritical devotion to Stalin's every word as a revelation did nothing to breed critical intellectuals in the ranks of the CPC. As a general rule, the closer an intellectual was to the leadership of the Party, the greater his

orthodoxy on matters on doctrinal interpretation. Not surprisingly then, the closest scrutiny of Ryerson's writings up until 1956, reveals not even one critical comment directed against any of Stalin's political or theoretical arguments.

Between the time Ryerson joined the Communist Party and Stalin's death (in 1952), numerous theoretical innovations were developed by Stalin and his designated theoretical experts. Each of them was carefully and assiduously studied by the leading members of the CPC. In some cases -- for example with Stalin's Marxism and Linguistics (1950) the Party leaderships efforts to popularize the meaning of the new pronouncements sparked prolonged debates over the correct interpretation. (There were never any debates over whether the pronouncements were valid or consistent with other aspects of Marxist theory.) Ryerson was only really engaged in popularizing and commenting upon two such theoretical pronouncements: Stalin's "Dialectical and Historical Materialism", and a 1943 essay on the "Teaching of Economics in the Soviet Union". His comments on each of them are best examined and appreciated in the context of his book A World to Win.

Stalinism for Beginners: Ryerson's Book "A World To Win"

The 130 odd pages of Ryerson's book A World to Win (1946) provides us with decisive evidence that his theoretical work was done in the Stalinist mould. In its pages -- taken together with a few other theoretical writings from the same period -- we

find many of the key features already identified as peculiar to Stalin's interpretation of historical materialism. A World to Win exhibits a technicist conception of production, a distributional theory of class and an instrumentalist theory of the state -- all predicated upon a foundation of Stalin's "dialectical materialism" (which in Ryerson's rendition comes complete with a reflection theory of consciousness, an interactionist conception of dialectics, etc.).

We begin with one of the last chapters of A World to Win, where Ryerson discusses "the world outlook of Marxism ... known as dialectical materialism." This was not his first venture into the realm of Marxist philosophy -- nor was it to be his last. In 1945 Ryerson had published an article on dialectics that we can consider at the same time as his 1946 discussion from A World to Win. In his 1945 article Ryerson defined "dialectical materialism ... as the scientific method applied to the world and to problems of human development"¹⁹ -- a position also echoed in his book. In an effort to encourage working class Communists not to be mystified by "dialectical materialism," Ryerson assured them that

People understand how the growth of science in the last century or so has revolutionized our conditions of life. Our job is to help them learn how applying science to social and political problems will make possible an even greater change.²⁰

As one might expect, Ryerson exhibited no sense that the object of 'social science' -- conscious human beings -- might pose somewhat different problems for a scientific Marxism than those faced by the natural sciences. The failure to differentiate the methodological and theoretical concerns necessary for any Marxist 'social science' from those typical of the positivistic 'natural sciences,' reflects a failure to appreciate the differences between Stalin's crude materialism and the materialism advocated by Marx.

Following Stalin's presentation in "Dialectical and Historical Materialism", Ryerson explained that the Communist method of thinking "involve(s) two things, one fairly easily understood, the other much less so: the materialist interpretation and the dialectical method or approach."²¹ Again following Stalin, he first explained the philosophical term "materialism" for his readership: "Materialism, in philosophy, simply means the recognition that the world is in the first place a material reality, existing independently of us ... and our ideas and consciousness arise on a material foundation, and reflect the world around us."²² Elaborating on the same point in his article, Ryerson provided an example which leaves little doubt about the strain of technological determinism he had picked up from Stalin's essay:

consider Marshall Stalin's statement: "The war of today is a war of motors. It will be won by the side that has an overwhelming superiority in the production of motors." Stalin places the greatest emphasis on people: "People decide everything": but he understands the real inter-relation between material conditions and human consciousness ... the connection between changes in material conditions and changes in men's minds and actions.... This approach, which is materialist in the philosophical sense of the word, is actually implicit in the attitude of scientists in their laboratory....

He adds,

This approach presupposes that the material world was there before we were, that our living is built upon it, that it exists independently of us, and can be known objectively, by degrees at least.²³

This is a straight regurgitation of Stalin's views on materialism and the reflective character of human consciousness. (The technicist version of historical materialism and its origins in Engels' writings is further discussed in Appendix # 1.) By making the world "in the first place a material reality," Ryerson was -- following Stalin -- contravening Marx's stricture about the 'abstract' character of any concept of nature which excluded man as a simultaneously human and natural being. It was that artificial separation between matter and mind which underlie the technological determinism and the positivistic quality of his 'motors' example and his comments on science.

Part and parcel of the technicism in Ryerson's philosophical view was an uncritical acceptance of a reflection theory of consciousness. By seeing man as a passive receiver of external stimuli which impinge on his mind creating consciousness Ryerson was reaffirming the dualism in Stalin's theory. By making mind simply a stage of matter, Ryerson

systematically reduced the social and conscious dimension of human reality to something derivative from matter.

As we saw earlier, this dichotomy between mind and matter, between social reality and material reality is -- for Marx -- a false one. In his Theses on Feuerbach, where he stresses the character of human labour as constitutive of both the material and the social worlds, Marx rejects crude materialism and the reflection theory of consciousness to which it gives rise. Not surprisingly, Ryerson's description of idealism as the major philosophical opponent to his materialism is based on an equally crude characterization. He describes idealism as

the 'respectable' viewpoint in our society, which claims that the spirit is primary, and the world is its by-product; that ideas are the foundation on which the world and society are built, while material factors are only of secondary importance.²⁴

For Ryerson, the choice was quite clear: the "common sense" (Ryerson's expression) materialism of technicism, or the idealism which "is also used to bolster the role of reactionary forces." He did not understand that these caricatures of materialism and idealism converged in their inability to theorize human reality as the product of man's material and social objectification. Indeed, as we saw in our discussion of Stalin, that was precisely the basis upon which Stalin was able to combine the two in his own unmediated and inconsistent brand of determinism/voluntarism.

Far from rejecting out of hand the importance of idealism, Marx actually acknowledged the importance of idealism's contribution to his own views in his Theses on Feuerbach:

The chief defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that things, reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was set forth abstractly by idealism.... Feuerbach ... does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary", of "practical-critical", activity.²⁵

Just substitute the names Stalin and Ryerson for that of Feuerbach, and you have the Marxist critique of Ryerson's metaphysics. The inspiration is clearly from Stalin, rather than from Marx.

Ryerson's description of the 'materialist' basis of his philosophical stance is also interesting because it points to another major problem in Stalin's Marxism. In the motors example, Ryerson quotes Stalin to the effect that "People decide everything" on the one hand, and yet he maintains that the outcome of the war is explainable on a purely technical basis -- which side has the superiority in motors. In the same breath we have an extreme idealistic formulation coupled with the crudest technological determinism imaginable. The two, idealism and mechanical materialism, are combined non-dialectically such that the material level of production is decisive; people then live out precisely the drama pre-ordained

for them by the material process of production. The "real inter-relation between material conditions and human consciousness" is such that human beings are reduced to mere expressions of the real agents of history -- things like motors.

Now, turning to Ryerson's discussion of dialectics, we find that his description of the dialectical character of reality clearly omits the one decisive element which prohibits its use as a description of the laws of motion of matter, considered independently of human beings -- the teleological aspect of human labour. It is this teleological quality of all human labour, which gives the dialectic its quality of negativity, and human history its quality of self-movement, as we saw in our discussion of Marx's concept of production. Yet Ryerson describes the dialectic as a mere methodological formula, while ignoring its critical component of teleology:

The dialectical method is one which grasps things in their motion, change and development -- seeing the universe as it is, not static or fixed, but filled with constant movement, a network of processes, interconnected, interdependent, and interacting. The dialectical method provides an understanding of the nature of change -- gradual and sudden, peaceful and stormy. It explains how changes come about as a result of conflicts of opposing, contradictory tendencies, which are part and parcel of all things, of all reality.²⁶

In strict accord with Stalin's philosophical position, Ryerson sees dialectics as a method for describing the laws of the cosmos, quite independent of any consideration of the existence of human beings. Here the dialectic is a description of the

laws of motion of all matter -- the key to explaining human history. This contrasts with Marx's emphasis on Hegel's greatest achievement: "the dialectic of negativity as the moving and creating principle" of human history -- that dialectic stemming from the fact that Hegel "grasps the essence of labour."²⁷

As hinted at in the above discussion about the way in which Ryerson's philosophy duplicated Stalin's combination of radical idealism with technological determinism, Ryerson also seeks to avoid the problems posed by this dualism by falling back upon an interactionist conception of the relation between the material world and human consciousness. Contrast Ryerson's argument .

Man's ideas, his knowledge, and the material world from which they arise, interact; conscious thought arises from and reflects the world of matter -- and in turn, acts upon it, through man's practical activity.²⁸

with Marx's position in the first of his Theses on Feuerbach cited above. Ryerson's formulation is that material reality (conceived of as excluding human consciousness, social relations etc.) creates man's consciousness and social relations which reflect the character and state of matter. Man then serves as the vehicle whereby material reality, making itself conscious, then acts back upon itself in order to change itself through the labour of human beings. Man is here reduced to a mere instrument of material reality which is the real agent of history.

The 1945 article on philosophy in which Ryerson discusses dialectics (entitled "Lenin on 'New Methods of Thinking'") was based in part on a 1939 book by a British Communist: David Guest's A Textbook of Dialectical Materialism.²⁹

It was from chapter III of this book which Ryerson derived his understanding of Lenin's discussion of dialectics in the Philosophical Notebooks (Volume 38 of Lenin's collected works). Guest's highly selective account of Lenin's argument enabled Ryerson to miss Lenin's refutation of the reflection theory of consciousness (a view which he had held prior to reading Hegel during the years of World War I). Lenin wrote: "Man's consciousness not only reflects the objective world, but creates it... the world does not satisfy man and man decides to change it by his activity."³⁰ Implicit here is also a complete rejection of the interactionist theory of the relation between matter and consciousness. Lenin's claim is that the two interpenetrate, such that a conception of them as discrete factors of reality (with one being the external cause of the other) is impossible.

The entire basis of the Stalinist conception of the connection between matter and consciousness is confirmed in the way Ryerson posits the material objective world exclusively as a given objectivity, and not as something which was itself created by man. Ryerson sees the relation between man and nature as a dualistic one, in contrast to Marx's anthropomorphic

view of nature as a product of man's activity. Because Ryerson adheres to the same abstract materialism as Feuerbach (transmitted through the entire technicist tradition of Marxism, as documented in Appendix #1). Marx's criticisms of Feuerbach are also applicable to the philosophical positions advanced in A World to Win. Marx wrote that

(Feuerbach) ... does not see that the senuous world around him is not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society; and indeed, (a product) in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing its industry and its intercourse, and modifying its social system according to the changed needs. 31

Ryerson, like Stalin, forgot that the material world was a humanly constructed world, because of the metaphysical basis of his materialism and the displacement of human practical activity from the center of his theory.

Following the structure of Stalin's essay "Dialectical and Historical Materialism," Ryerson's discussion of dialectics in A World to Win had preceded a consideration of historical materialism. Imitating Stalin, Ryerson claimed that the "world outlook" of dialectical materialism "applied to the social life of man ... gives us the materialist conception of history."³²

Ryerson's interpretation of historical materialism is evident throughout the book, so we begin our investigation in Chapter III ("The Road by which We Came"), which deals with the origins of capitalism. There, Ryerson exhibited a crass technological determinism, along with a Stalinist interpretation of the concept of the productive forces. He wrote:

What is the main difference between the frontier settlement that existed in Upper Canada in the eighteen twenties and the Ontario of today? More than anything else, it's the fact that the spinning wheel, the hand loom and the stage coach have been replaced by modern factory production, power driven machinery, railways, air and auto transport....
 "While hand in hand with the growth of these productive forces there have come changes in people's mode of life, in social relationships."³³

This passage demonstrates the same technicism we saw in Stalin's "Dialectical and Historical Materialism," applied to Canadian circumstances. The productive forces, here narrowly conceived of as the material instruments of production, were portrayed as the agents of history. Although the last sentence states that changes in the relations of production came "hand in hand" with the changes in the productive forces, there can be little doubt about Ryerson's meaning here. Whether Ryerson interpreted machines as the driving force of history or machines interacting with -- but in the last instance determinant over -- social relations, the effect is the same: the technicist version of Marxism replaces human labour by material technological development as the driving force of history. (This point was discussed in Chapter VI and is further elaborated upon in the Appendix.)

The same view is evident in Ryerson's discussion of the development of human society beyond Primitive

Communism. According to Ryerson, such a development was only possible with technical improvements in the way the material factors of production were combined. Primitive production is abstracted from the social relations existing at the time:

How was society able to grow beyond this early, primitive stage? By discovering how to work and use metals (in place of stone tools), to domesticate animals, and to till the soil. With these advances

in technique, came the possibility of producing a surplus over and above the bare minimum needed for existence; with the production of surpluses, came the possibility of exchange of products, and the development of a division of labour in the work of production.³⁴

Ryerson subscribed to the notion that it was the "growth of the means of producing life's necessities" that caused social relations between people to change.³⁵

This theoretical reliance upon the gradual and cumulative growth of the 'productive forces' (i.e., the material means of production) helped to give Ryerson's conception of human history an evolutionary and gradualist quality. Social 'progress' was a function of technological development, while history was understood as a unilinear succession of modes of production distinguished from one another only by the level of development of their respective material processes of production, and by the corresponding social forms of property ownership/surplus labour appropriation/exploitation (i.e., the social relations of distribution) characteristic of each. Ryerson's description of feudalism illustrates the reductionism inherent in his understanding of the concept of the social relations of production:

Under feudalism the relations of production are based on a system of landholding, in which the great landholders live off the labour of peasant serfs, who are bound to the soil. The serf is no longer a chattel, an object of property like the slave, but is forced to remain on the plot of land which he holds from his overlord, and to hand to the latter a fixed portion of his product.³⁶

In this account, the social relations of production appear to be relations between individual landholders (i.e., surplus labour appropriators) and peasants (i.e., necessary labour appropriators), aggregated into class relations, instead of being understood as class relations which adopt different forms and which mediate the relations between individual lords and peasants. Moreover, Ryerson completely omits any discussion of the feudal state as a form of the class domination of the lords. In another chapter of his book, Ryerson once again distinguished between modes of production on the basis of forms of property ownership (where property is understood as a relation to a thing) and their corresponding forms of revenue acquisition, rather than the class relations underlying these social forms:

Under the slave system the slave, his tools and the product of his labour belong to the master. Everything over and above the cost of the slave's upkeep is the slave owner's gain.

Under feudalism, the peasant vassal turned over all his surplus product to the feudal lord as a fixed obligation.

Under capitalism, too, the surplus is appropriated in the form of profit, by the factory owner; but in this case what takes place is not open and above board. Instead there is a kind of slight of hand operation. As in the earlier system, there is exploitation; but the form of it is different.³⁷

Thus, history was periodised without -- for example -- any reference to the state as a social relation. The extent to which Ryerson distinguished historical periods on the basis of property forms and/or forms of exploitation, rather than the totality of class relations had been evident in French Canada.

There, Ryerson had written:

To understand fully the degree to which the prolonged maintenance of feudalism in French Canada has impeded development and laid special burdens on its people, it is necessary to examine ... the way in which the seigneurial system was "abolished" by certain legal acts affecting property rights.... The Act of 1854 ... is generally credited with "abolishing feudalism" in Lower Canada....³⁸

With this type of argument feudalism is reduced from a mode of production -- in Marx's rich sense -- to a mere system of landownership by means of which seigneurs were able to lay "special burdens" on the habitants. Here we have the classic Stalinist reduction of the social relations of production to the form of exploitation, the form of property taken together with the form of revenue acquisition. (Ryerson's qualification of the word abolition in the above quote should not mislead anyone. He uses quotation marks not because he believed that the Act in 1854 did not really abolish feudalism, but because of his desire to contrast the settlement surrounding the abolition with "what the people's interests, and those of economic progress required... the abolition without compensation of all the seigneurial rights and privileges." ^{38a} The context of his discussion in French Canada makes this quite clear.)

In another example -- this time taken from the book 1873 -- we can see Ryerson employing reductionist concepts of the forces and relations of production to set up the explanation of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in nineteenth century Canada.

Lower Canada ... was one of the few areas on the North American continent where the institutions and relationships of feudalism had been brought into being in their completeness. With the emergence of capitalist machine industry, based on wage-labour and advanced technique, the problem, arose here, as elsewhere, of eliminating these outgrown property relationships, based on land tenure and primitive agrarian production.³⁹

"Feudalism" here means a mode of production defined according to the primitive level of its technique (i.e., the degree of development of a material process of production) and the form.

of land tenure as the property form. Similarly, "capitalism" is identified by reference to the presence of advance level of technique involving machines in a material process of production coupled with wage labour as the form of exploitation (i.e., the form of property ownership/revenue acquisition). Elsewhere in the same book, Ryerson describes the transition to capitalism with the same Stalinist conceptual apparatus: the level of technique, the form of property ownership and the form of revenue acquisition:

The transition from feudal society, based on land tenure, exploitation of serfs, and a primitive technique, to modern society, based on large scale machine industry, and capitalist exploitation of wage labour, extended over four centuries.⁴⁰

The base/superstructure metaphor is then employed to explain how the essential transition, that occurring in the aforementioned 'economic base' is reflected in the political superstructure:

This transition from feudalism to capitalism, from the rule of a landed oligarchy to the rule of the commercial and industrial middle class, found its political expression in the struggle to establish parliamentary democracy and responsible government.... (my emphasis)⁴¹

Ryerson identifies the existence of two apparently distinct forms of struggle in the transition from feudalism to capitalism in the Canadas, the form of exploitation and the political form. By making the political form of the struggle simply an expression of the struggle within the economic base, the former is attributed a derivative and secondary meaning. Moreover, the

mere fragmentation of the struggle into two apparently separate forms is never questioned. All this demonstrates that Ryerson was working with the reductionist conceptual apparatus typical of the Stalinist tradition. (These examples are cited simply to demonstrate that Ryerson was indeed writing within the Stalinist tradition. Some of the implications this had for his actual historical analysis will become clear when we examine his discussion of the rebellions of 1837-38 in his book Unequal Union, in a later Chapter.)

In A World to Win Ryerson succeeded in distinguishing capital as a social relation from capital as means of production:

We usually think of capital as a "thing", made up of plant, machinery, materials, money. Yet all of these are passive, incapable of creating anything until living labour is applied in the process of production. Actually capital is a social relation: it is command over labour, made possible by the bosses' monopoly ownership of the tools of production and the workers' condition of propertylessness, which obliges them to sell the one commodity they possess: their ability to work, their labour power.⁴²

Yet throughout his book, and indeed even in his later work Ryerson did not demonstrate an understanding that in addition to being a social relation in the sphere of distribution, capital is a social relation which encompasses the relations of dominance in the labour process and in politics. Ownership and command of labour considered as a material factor of production is a conception of the capital relation inadequate to generate the Marxist notions of workers'

control in the labour process and over the state.

All of a piece with his general displacement of human labour and class struggle from the center of his analysis was the way in which Ryerson simply paid lip service to the idea that the class struggle was "the motive power of history."⁴³

In his discussion of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe, Ryerson seemed unable to actually identify any "motive power" of history, other than the activity of merchants and the effects of trade. He wrote:

The early division of labour, between handicrafts and agriculture (within the feudal mode of production -BM), had lead to the growth of exchange, and the production of goods for sale on the market: in other words, the production of commodities.

With the market, there came a new division of labour: the appearance on the scene of a new class, concerned not with production but with the exchange of products -- the class of merchants.

The merchants ... developed commerce and communications and the use of metallic money ... gradually gained in wealth, profiting by the feudal wars; they got the upper hand in the towns and the cities, and began to challenge the power of the great landowners.

This new, rising class of merchant capitalists were ... the historical forerunners of the capitalist class of our own time.

... Spurred by the advance of commerce, an upsurge of invention and scientific advance occurred in Europe ... speedily followed by the great voyages of discovery, pushing back horizons. With the drive for expanding trade, for gold and silver, the merchant capitalists reached out for the treasures of Asia, Africa and the Americas. They created the world market.

In four hundred years of piracy, looting and bloodshed, they created capitalism. (emphasis in original).⁴⁴

Here it is neither the class struggle nor even the 'contradiction between the forces and relations of production' which lead to

historical change, but the activities of the merchant class. Technological determinism enters into the formula, only by providing the initial impetus for the division of labour between handicrafts and agriculture (as we saw above, in the discussion of the transition from Primitive Communism to class society). Nowhere in this account do the underclasses play any role; the While this emphasis upon the growth of the market and the activity of the merchant class is an unusual departure from Ryerson's typical emphasis upon technological development, it does not represent a serious break from the tendency to displace the class struggle from the center of his analysis. Nowhere in this account do the underclasses play any role; the struggles of the peasantry throughout the centuries of the transition disappear as a factor of any consequence. (This emphasis on the importance of the merchant class in A World to Win is somewhat ironic considering Ryerson's later criticisms of Naylor's work as marred by the "market mystique.")

A World to Win discussed the class nature of the capitalist state as an organ of class rule, indicating that Ryerson shared the Stalinist perception of it as simply an instrument of the ruling class, its particular form being devoid of any class character. He wrote,

Under capitalism, state power is held by the capitalist class -- whatever the form of their government may be: constitutional monarchy or republic, parliamentary rule or fascism.⁴⁶

Ryerson insisted, that whatever the particular form of the capitalist state, "the substance of state power belongs to the

ruling capitalists". However, nowhere does he indicate that the mere existence of the capitalist state as a separate and distinct form of the social relations between capital and labour is itself an important feature of the capitalist mode of production.

Ryerson quite pointedly rejected nationalization as a means of transforming capitalism. Such state capitalist measures (his expression) would not change "the basic class character of the economy, resting on private ownership of the main means of production, and exploitation of wage labour" would remain. Moreover, the capitalist class would still control the state. Ryerson argued that

Only when the state, the organ of power, is in the hands of the working class, and the capitalist class has been ousted from power, and its old apparatus of control done away with -- only then does ownership of the large scale means of production become Socialist in character.⁴⁷

Thus, socialism did not simply equal nationalization of property, but nationalization of property where political power was in the hands of the representatives of the working class -- the Communist party. The two conditions taken together, could transform the class nature of the old bourgeois state apparatus, without actually destroying it. Missing from all of Ryerson's discussion on the state was Marx's discussion of the need for a workers' state to abolish the standing army in favour of the armed might of the working class, the need to replace the old

bourgeois parliament with workers' councils and so on; missing was the argument about the need to smash the state which had played so prominent a part in Marx and Lenin's writings.

A final point, before concluding the discussion of A World to Win. The evolutionary and gradualist approach to human history which was so characteristic of Stalin's followers, also carried with it an implication about the "inevitability" of progress, and therefore of socialism. Ryerson fits the pattern, writing

In terms of history, Socialism is inevitable: the "economic law of movement" of capitalist society, expanding the productive forces, socializing the labour process, provides the material foundation for it.⁴⁸

This compares rather badly with Marx's contention, in the Communist Manifesto, that the outcome of the class struggle might be "the common ruin of the contending classes",⁴⁹ or even with Rosa Luxemburg's famous statement about the prospects for "socialism or barbarism". Marx's revulsion toward speculative theories of history, which attribute a teleological quality to history as a process independent of men, made it impossible to see socialism as "inevitable" in Ryerson's sense.⁵⁰ For Ryerson, as for Stalin, the inevitability of socialism stems from the inevitable, though gradual, growth of the productive forces. This independent variable of human history is never accounted for in their work.

Once again, to avoid the appearance of the crudest determinism imaginable, Ryerson reassured his readers that the inevitability of socialism "doesn't mean that Socialism can be achieved automatically, without struggle". However, his assurances should have been little comfort to his comrades in the CPC; all he guaranteed was that the grand design of history, and the necessity inherent in the productive forces would act through people. The working class was to become conscious that it was the instrument of a driving force in history far greater than itself -- namely the autonomous development of the 'productive forces'.

Whatever Ryerson's intentions, in reality Communist theory was designed to justify the manipulation of the working class by an aspiring ruling class. Developed in Moscow, it placed Party bureaucrats outside of history as the only correct interpreters of the grand design of cosmic development.

If Ryerson's A World to Win was an important part of the Communist leadership's response to the post-war ideological weakness of the Party, an even more important publication was Tim Buck's Canada: The Communist Viewpoint. Published in 1948, Buck's book contained a Foreward by Ryerson, which testified that this publication was "scientifically sound" since it was based on that fusion of scientific method and working class struggle that is the essence of Marxism, here masterfully applied to the most vital of Canadian problems.⁵¹

Ryerson's glowing praise is telling when we examine Buck's interpretation of basic Marxist ideas. Without attempting to reconstruct Buck's entire conception of Marxism we can

highlight some of the more obviously technicist components of his argument. To begin with, Buck parroted Stalin's cosmological concerns by replicating his abstract conception of dialectics:

In the welter of innumerable changes taking place in nature, Marx discerned the law of motion -- the dialectical relationship which runs like a connecting thread through the seeming chaos of events. He discovered this law in operation in nature, in social development, and in the thought processes of mankind. In fact, the much misrepresented dialectical laws which Marx discovered to be the laws of motion of nature, society and human thought, are simply the most general and universal characteristics of developing change.⁵²

Here we have Marx discovering dialectical laws in nature, and finding that they also apply to the spheres of social relations and to that of ideas (i.e., the superstructural sphere). These laws of motion are presented as cosmological principles, the "universal characteristics of developing change."

Buck demonstrated a rigidly orthodox adherence to the Stalinist conception of production. The following quote leaves little doubt that production was viewed as an exclusively material-technical process:

Marx traced the roots of social relationships to the conditions determined by the degree of development of material production. He found that changes in social relationships always correspond with changes in the degree of development of material production.⁵³

Added on were several other features of the Stalinist version of Marxist theory: the self-activity of the productive forces as the chief agent of history ("Marx showed that developing

forces of production have their own dynamic. They change inexorably...."); adherence to the reflection theory of consciousness ("consciousness and thinking, in general, reflect the material world"); and acceptance of an instrumentalist view of politics in accordance with the base/superstructure model -- witness the following:

As the need grows for changes in the relations of production, the established legal and political superstructure is utilized increasingly by the beneficiaries of the existing relationships to prevent change.⁵⁴

Orthodox Stalinist theory was the undisputed interpretation of Marxism within the Communist Party, unchallenged by anyone -- least of all Ryerson. But there is another important dimension of Stalin's interpretation of Marxism that is essential to understanding Ryerson's work -- the doctrine of partiinost. In the next chapter, we discuss the way Ryerson subordinated theory to the needs of the Party line, in the context of his book 1837.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER VIII

1. see the Submission of the Dominion Communist Labour Total War Committee to The National War Labour Board Inquiry into Labour Relations, presented by Tim Buck, May 27th, 1943 and the Resolution of the National Party Conference, of the Communist Party of Canada, February 1942.
2. see Ivan Avakumovic's The Communist Party in Canada, McClelland and Stewart, 1975, pp. 150, 158-9.
3. ibid., p. 168.
4. ibid., pp. 164-5; also see Communism Versus Opportunism, by Fergus McKean, published by In Struggle.
5. see The American Communist Party, by Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, Praeger, 1957, pp. 425-426.
6. ibid., p. 439.
7. ibid., pp. 441-449.
8. see the article "How Are You Using 'A World to Win'," in Club Life, Vol. 4 #2, 1947, p. 2.
9. see the article "Mastery of Marxism-Leninism" dealing with the results of a National Committee meeting of the CPC held in 1945, in Club Life, Vol. 2, #8, p. 5.
10. ibid.
11. see "The Epoch of Fulfillment of Marxism," by Tim Buck, in National Affairs Monthly, Vol. 4 #1, Jan. 1947, p. 38.
12. see "Twenty Five Years of Communist Activity", by Tim Buck, National Affairs Monthly (hereafter NAM). Vol. 3, #8, Sept. 1946, p. 282.
13. see "A Great Party for Great Tasks", by Stanley Ryerson (hereafter SR), NAM, Vol. 3 #7, July 1946, p. 201.
14. Communist Review, #8/9, Dec. 1935-Jan. 1936, p. 27.
15. Clarté, October 4th, 1939, p. 2.
16. "Man of the Party of Communism", SR, NAM, Vol. 11 #11, 1949, pp. 378-379.
17. NAM, Vol. 10, #1, p. 57.

18. Kenny Papers, University of Toronto (Fisher Library), Box 18.
19. see Ryerson's article "Lenin on 'New Methods of Thinking'," NAM, Vol. 2, #1, 1945, p. 17.
20. ibid.
21. ibid.
22. see Ryerson's A World to Win, Progress Books, 1950, p. 117.
23. Ryerson, "Lenin on 'New Methods...'", p. 18.
24. Ryerson, A World to Win, p. 118.
25. The German Ideology, by Marx and Engels, Progress Books, 1964, p. 618.
26. A World To Win, p. 118.
27. cited in Marxism and Freedom, by Raya Dunayevskaya, Pluto Press, 1975, p. 34.
28. A World to Win, pp. 119-129.
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CHAPTER IX

THE PARTY USES OF HISTORY: RYERSON'S
 "1837: THE BIRTH OF CANADIAN DEMOCRACY"

When Ryerson joined the Communist Party in the early 1930s, not only did he join a thoroughly "bolshevized" Party (i.e., a loyal Stalinist organization), he also became politically active during a period in which Stalin's Comintern had embarked upon a policy of ultra-leftism of a sort once criticised by Lenin (in Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder).

Stalin's Comintern in the Era of the Depression: From
 Ultra-Leftism to Class Collaboration

By 1928, several events combined to inspire Stalin to push the Comintern far to the left. First, Stalin sought to isolate Bukharin and the right wing within the Bolshevik party. Second, he had to escape blame for the disastrous failures of the Comintern's right wing policies in Britain (1926) and China (1927). And third, he wanted to weaken the ability of the West to launch a war against the Soviet Union as he embarked upon the forced collectivization of agriculture, and the liquidation of the Kulak class.¹ (Stalin reasoned that the frenzied activity of Western Communists preparing for the imminent revolution would give the ruling classes of the west enough headaches to make them forget any plans to intervene in Russia.) Howe and Coser explain:

The late 1920's were bleak and bewildering years for international communism. Not merely had the movement itself been fractured ... into irreconcilable groups ... but on almost every front the Communist parties suffered humiliating defeats, partly as a result of their weakness and inexperience but still more because of the ill considered policies dictated by the increasingly authoritarian and nationalistic regime in Moscow.... The catastrophic "right" policy of the Communist movement had coincided with Stalin's destruction of the Trotskyist opposition. Now ... he suddenly veered far to the left, first to capitalize on the predictable revulsion within the Comintern against the policies of 1924-27, second to find an ideological rationale and an organizational base from which to launch a vendetta against the Bukharin tendency, and third to develop within the Communist movement an ideological equivalent to the widespread use of terror which his new domestic policy in Russian would require.²

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern carried out the shift to the left, by arguing that the world was on the verge of a revolutionary upheaval in which it would no longer be necessary for Communists to engage in defensive actions with Social Democrats. In 1929, the Comintern direction for Communists to fight "class against class" was coupled with the idea that Social Democrats were "social fascists" impeding the revolutionary upsurge that was alleged to have begun. The politics inherent in Lenin's Left Wing Communism ... were abandoned, as Communists everywhere advocated the creation of new "revolutionary" trade unions, and denounced not only the reformist leadership of mainstream unions, but the workers within them as well. This inability to distinguish between the leadership of Social Democratic unions and parties, and

their working class membership had the inevitable effect of isolating the Communists from the majority of politicized workers -- who were usually found under the banners of Social Democracy.³ Sectarianism and elitism was the only possible political course, once the remaining Canadian Communists accepted the Comintern's argument that:

In countries where there are strong social democratic parties, fascism assumes the particular form of social fascism, which to an ever-increasing extent serves the bourgeoisie as an instrument for the paralyzing of the activity of the masses....⁴

Capitalism was understood to be undergoing a process of "fascization", in which the ruling class and the Social Democrats assumed the character of "fascists". Wild conspiracy theories abounded, as Communists (the only 'true' representatives of the working class) were urged to concentrate their efforts on destroying Social Democracy. The independent class base of fascism as a petit bourgeois movement, not strictly directed (in any instrumentalist fashion) by the bourgeoisie, was completely ignored -- with tragic results in Germany.⁵ Indeed, by mistakenly identifying Hitler's rise to power as a manifestation of the degeneration of capitalism and the inevitability of revolution,⁶ Communist parties everywhere sowed the seeds of evolutionism and passivity in the face of an enormous threat to the working class.

Howe and Coser explain how this ultra leftism of the early years of the Depression (a period when the class struggle

in North America was at an ebb) gave rise to an elitist political view that contravened the Marxist principle of the self-emancipation of the working class, replacing it with emancipation by the party. Despite setbacks, Communists retained their beliefs through

a systematic, often comic exaggeration of the revolutionary potential of strikes, unemployed demonstrations (etc. -BM).... by a tacit belief in some cataclysmic and total change in ... patterns of thought ... (and by -BM) resorting implicitly to (the) ... theory of "electrification" ... according to which the party had to embark upon offensive after offensive, bloody and painful as these might be, in order to shock a sluggish working class into a revolutionary mood.... the communists tried to persuade their supporters that the movement was steadily marching forward.... If, however, there was defeat at any point (Third Period theory made no allowance for defeat, but reality sometimes forced its recognition), this was due to the betrayals of the Socialist and other labour leaders who systematically misled a working class that, by its very nature, was constantly tensed for revolution.⁷

It was this ultra-leftist perspective which brought to the fore several notions that would ^{be} common stock among Communists ever after. The idea that the absence of a revolutionary situation could be explained by the "betrayal" of the social democrats denied that working class people had any active role to play in understanding their world. Instead, they were simply instruments being wielded by the "social fascists."^{7a} Premised as it was upon a quite un-Marxist view of the relation between working class consciousness and social reality, this Communist acceptance of the betrayal syndrome militated against the possibility of the CP winning the leadership of the working

class by demonstrating the veracity of its ideas in practice. Communists could hardly persuade the non-Communist working class while denouncing all but those under Communist influence as reactionary.

Angus has recently demonstrated that the Canadian Communist Party was plagued by all the idiocies of the Comintern's Third Period politics. In his book Canadian Bolsheviks he provides numerous examples of the ultra-leftist politics that prevailed in the Party Ryerson joined.^{7b} We can mention two, just to illustrate the kind of organization that Ryerson was attracted to in the thirties. Toronto Party members singlehandedly launched a suicidal campaign to defy restrictions imposed on the freedom of speech by holding public rallies and doing battle with the police. They refused to undertake serious efforts to mobilize non-communists (who were, after all, "social fascists") with the result that the working class movement was dealt a serious defeat. Angus explains,

The party's go-it-alone policy, its contempt for all possible allies, its constant overestimation of its own strength, its arrogant challenges to the cops -- these things left it hopelessly isolated in a battle it could not win alone. The outcome was ... virtual outlawing of labour protest meetings from the streets and parks of Toronto until 1933....^{7c}

Another example is provided by the CP's policy of dual unionism during the Third Period. The Workers Unity League -- the name given to the central organization which embraced

the 'revolutionary' unions initiated by Canadian Communists

-- combined

a readiness to enter all-out combat, regardless of the balance of forces involved, with a total refusal to seek allies beyond its own ranks. This combination of adventurism and sectarianism led to defeat after defeat. 7d

Angus illustrates his point by discussing the strikes of workers in the needle trades in Toronto throughout 1930. Communists obstructed the efforts of the International union to organize needle trades workers (the CP also had its own separate union for these workers) by openly calling on members of its union to cross picket lines and scab on the strike organized by the reformist union. Angus draws the conclusion:

Time and again the Workers Unity League, through a combination of adventurist tactics and sectarian refusal to cooperate with other labour organizations, led groups of workers into defeat. There could be nothing more absurd than to label this policy "revolutionary." The main result was weakening of the labour movement.... 7e

The acceptance of the theory of social fascism among Communist leaders -- including Canadian Communists like Ryerson -- was crucial in establishing subservient national leaderships willing to carry out orders handed down from on high.⁸ Those who could accept the doctrine of social fascism "and see in it proof of the wisdom and virtue of the Comintern were the ones who would be ready to accept everything, every twist and turn of Stalinist policy from the Popular Front to the Hitler-Stalin pact."⁹ More importantly, once the Communists

had rejected the working class as the agent of history, substituting the elite party; the way had been paved for the reformism that would follow after 1935. (That the Bolsheviks and Lenin did originally see the working class rather than the Party as the agent of history is evident from Lenin's State and Revolution, as elaborated in the Appendix.) If the party could substitute for the working class, then why not the progressive sections of the bourgeoisie, "democratic peoples", and so on.

Following the agreement on a military assistance pact between Russia and France in May 1934, the Comintern began a move away from the ultra left politics of the Third Period (i.e., the period between 1928 and 1934), towards the class collaborationist politics of the Popular Front. For the sake of bolstering the strength of the pre-pact forces within France, the Soviet Union instructed the French Communist party to abandon the struggle against the "social fascists," and in fact to unite with the Social Democrats and other political parties opposed to fascism. This was the beginning of Stalin's new political strategy.¹⁰

By the summer of 1935 and the convening of the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, Communist parties around the world had dropped their violent attacks on the Social Democrats, and were offering uncritical support for any political party -- including bourgeois political parties -- willing to oppose fascism (i.e., support the Soviet Union against Hitler's anti-Communist machinations).¹¹ Because some sections of the bourgeoisie and some Social Democrats would seek to oppose the international spread of fascism, they might ally themselves

with the Communists, and even lend support to the Soviet Union, provided the policies of the Communist party were devoid of revolutionary content. Stalin cared little whether this meant the workers' movement might fall under the hegemony of the 'progressive' bourgeoisie, so long as another opponent of Nazi Germany was created (thereby lessening the Soviet Union's political isolation). The Comintern under Stalin was motivated not by an opposition to Nazism per se, but its pre-occupation with defending the Soviet Union.¹² The creation of multi-class Popular Fronts on the national level was to have its counterpart in the creation of a multi-national Popular Front of states opposing Hitler, and defending each other as allies.

The Seventh Congress relinquished all intention of revolution. It was argued that the world was about to be swamped by fascism, and that the Soviet Union might be embroiled in a devastating war with Nazi Germany. Defence of the Soviet Union became the overriding priority, and Communists must take action to unify all national forces opposed to fascism and secure an alliance between their own State and the Soviet Union.¹³

Accordingly, the Seventh Congress of the Comintern made its central slogan "The fight for peace and for the defence of the USSR."¹⁴

The Popular Front policy meant relying on class collaboration, rather than relying on the Leninist strategy of the united front: a policy designed to unite Communists with social democratic and reformist workers in pursuit of common

goals, while maintaining the freedom to criticize and oppose the overall programs of the social democratic organizations. With the Popular Front policy, Communists were ready to subordinate the interests of the working class movement to those of the bourgeoisie in the name of the higher goal of the struggle against fascism (as if the immediate struggle against fascism could be divorced from the long terms struggle for socialism). Communist Parties agreed to suspend criticism of any organisation willing to enter an anti-fascist front (regardless of that organisation's other policies). They went so far as to promise support to governments of their anti-fascist allies, promising

they would support governments they did not control and that were not exclusively run by or controlled by the working class. In doing so, they abandoned what had been Marxist policy for generations ... no collaboration with the class enemy. The Bolsheviks had refused to enter a government that was not exclusively controlled by the working class because they refused to accept responsibility for a government that was controlled by the bourgeoisie, and that therefore would maintain capitalism.¹⁵

This abandonment of the political principle of the independent organization of the working class (in accordance with its independent class interests) had its counterpart within Stalinist theory in the abandonment of human labour and the class struggle as the driving force of history. The Popular Front strategy led to a simple dichotomy between "progressive" and "reactionary" social forces, with the former acting in accordance with the broad interests of Soviet foreign policy

as interpreted locally by the Communist Party; "reactionaries" were those who opposed those same interests.

The right wing drift of Comintern policy after 1934 helped to lay the political basis for Stalin's codification of Marxism in the essay "Dialectical and Historical Materialism" (which was published in 1938). The alternation of the ultra-left wing policies of the earlier period with the ultra-right wing policies of the second half of the decade paralleled the combination of voluntarism and determinism within Stalin's theory. In reality as in theory, both sides of this dichotomy served the purpose of undermining the idea that the working class through its activity was the force capable of changing history in a self-conscious manner. In Stalin's formulation, the leadership of the Communist movement (i.e., Stalin himself) were the only capable interpreters of the laws of the cosmos as they explained political and economic developments.

Accordingly, the Party (and within the Party -- the top leadership) became the agent of history. Politically, Stalin told Party members either that the working class was social fascist (between 1929 and 1934) or that by collaborating with other classes the Communist Parties could be part of a multi-class movement that would lead to "progressive" social change (after 1935). In both cases the independent self-activity of the working class disappeared.

However, the Popular Front policies did not represent a wholesale conversion to liberalism, since it coincided with

the show trials in Moscow. Nor was it simply the adoption of reformist policies, since the Communist parties retained their unswerving loyalty and obedience to Moscow.¹⁶ Despite the public abandonment of socialism and revolution, the Comintern had not abandoned the aim of replacing capitalism with state capitalist regimes under Communist control.¹⁷ Because the rhetoric -- designed not to frighten off the middle classes -- were reformist (despite the private intention of creating new Soviet regimes), Party members grew accustomed to the duplicity that characterized Communist politics after the depression.

The Depression and Communist Intellectuals

Having declined to less than 1400 members by 1931, the Canadian Communist Party grew in the conditions of the depression. Its efforts among the unemployed and its strategy of dual unionism brought it new recruits.¹⁸ However, the Party's rapid growth within the working class (to about 5500 members in mid-1934) was not coupled with a parallel growth in the number of intellectuals in the Party.¹⁹ Even Ryerson -- one of the very few intellectuals to join the CPC during its period of ultra-leftism -- had initially been attracted to the much larger Communist Party in France. Only after its adoption of the Popular Front strategy did the Canadian Party begin to recruit young intellectuals on a regular basis.²⁰

(The virtual absence of intellectuals within the ranks of the Canadian Communist Party when coupled with Ryerson's linguistic abilities, at least partially explains his rapid rise into the Party hierarchy. Furthermore, the paucity of Canadian Communists comfortable within the world of ideas explains the shortage of theoretical work done within the Party, and more particularly, it helps to explain how Ryerson could very quickly rise to the position of the CP's chief theoretician.) In a recent essay, Ryerson identified the year 1935 as a turning point in the Party's success among the intelligentsia:

With its traditional and strongly predominant working class composition, the Canadian Communist party at the time numbered few intellectuals in its membership. But by 1935 its gradual growth among the militant unemployed and workers in industry, whose struggles the Workers Unity League had been leading, was extending its influence to wider circles. Office and professional workers were being recruited ... by the end of 1935, there were new sections of the party organization in Montreal, one made up of units (clubs) of clerical and office workers, another of professionals.²¹

The abject shortage of Party intellectuals in Canada contrasts sharply with the situation in the British and American Parties, both of which experienced a dramatic influx of intellectuals throughout the entire decade. Neal Wood attributes the sudden interest in Communist politics among British intellectuals to the circumstances of the depression, in his book Communism and British Intellectuals.²² As the western world appeared to slide toward the worst effects of economic anarchy and chaos, respect for Soviet Russia with its

"planned economy" grew: This explanation of the British experience finds an echo in a recent article by Ryerson -- no doubt, partially illustrating his own conversion to the Communist Party:

The socialist cause drew sustenance and conviction from the embattled presence of a socialist reality. As against the rampant irrationality of the crisis-ridden "profit system" at home, there stood in glaring contrast the "pro-people", co-operative ownership and planned economy approach of Soviet society as then perceived by the Canadian Left. ... Seen from the crisis-stricken world of "free enterprise" corporate capitalism, the Soviet Union of the first five year economic plans ... was surely blazing the trail to new, open uplands of a future world.²³

The charges about a lack of democracy within the Soviet Union were either ignored or rationalized as the inevitable production of an undemocratic past, while the growth of economic 'equality' was highlighted.²⁴⁸ Wood explains that:

At a time when western capitalism was beset with unemployment, the Soviet Union, having embarked upon its first five year plan, was maintaining full employment in a herculean effort to industrialize and urbanize a feudal, agrarian land. For many intellectuals Soviet Russia was the one hope for the future.²⁴

Similarly, Howe and Coser have documented the movement of American intellectuals toward the left and the Communist Party during the years of the depression, in their book The American Communist Party.²⁵ Coming primarily from the artistic world rather than the academic world, those young

intellectuals attracted to Communism were in search of a set of new principles that could restore a sense of meaning and certainty to the harsh world of the thirties.²⁶ They found those ideals in Communism, though not without undergoing a transformation into disciplined Communists who would submit to the party line in the name of a higher good

because it spoke in the name of the oppressed and because it claimed to have become one with the spirit and direction of history, the party could simultaneously tap the idealism and the guilt of the intellectuals. They were to love Big Brother.... as an abstraction or as an absolute. Every dubious turn in tactics dictated by the foreign policy of the Russian state could be rendered sacred by invoking the Working class or the Party....

Even though Ryerson's decision to join the CPC in the early thirties was exceptional by Canadian standards, it follows a pattern clearly established elsewhere.

Ryerson, The Popular Front, and Communist Historiography

There were other ways in which Ryerson followed a pattern established by Communist intellectuals throughout the Comintern. One of the most important is his persistent use of theory -- and history in particular -- to legitimize the Party line of the moment. Any evaluation of his intellectual work must confront the problem of the extent to which his historical writing can be interpreted as a projection of the Party line back onto history. Norman Penner's evaluation of Ryerson's work -- especially the book French Canada -- is one which

attacks the Stalinist practice of subordinating theory to tactics. Penner argues that Ryerson's book was viewed

as "a weapon" for the immediate circumstances, and consequently its basic interpretation is devised to bolster the current tactical needs.²⁷

What Penner identifies as the confounding of theory and tactics is the practice which follows from the Communist intellectual's reliance on the doctrine of partiinost.

In making his argument around the book French Canada, Penner has drawn the ire of Greg Kealey who suggests that when discussing Ryerson's writings it is essential to distinguish "the 'use' the party made of the work with the work itself."²⁸

Penner's charge is, of course, a very serious one. To demonstrate that an entire corpus of historical analysis is based solely on the shifting sands of pragmatic and momentary political considerations, rather than firm theoretical principles is damaging in the extreme. Yet, I think Penner's demonstration of Stalin's proclivity to subordinate theory to tactical considerations is convincing; his claim that the same Stalinist "methodology ... greatly influenced the Communist Party of Canada in its theoretical work"²⁹ is persuasively argued. In what follows, I examine Ryerson's first book -- 1837 -- to illustrate and defend Penner's interpretation of Ryerson as a historian in the service of the

Party line (i.e., a Communist working in the spirit of the Doctrine of Partiinost).

The strength of Penner's argument lies in his ability to link the "renewed Communist interest in Canadian tradition, which began in the aftermath of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in 1935," directly to the pronouncements of Dimitrov and the Canadian Party leadership. At the Seventh Congress, Dimitrov gave the major report. He said,

Comrades, proletarian internationalism must, so to speak, "acclimatize itself" in each country in order to sink deep roots in its native land. ... The revolutionary proletariat is fighting to save the culture of the people, to liberate it from the shackles of decaying monopoly capitalism.³⁰

Communists who ... do nothing to enlighten the masses on the past of their own people, in a historically correct fashion, in a genuinely Marxist, a Marxist-Leninist, a Lenin-Stalin spirit, who do nothing to link up their present struggle with its revolutionary traditions and past -- voluntarily relinquish to fascist falseness all that is valuable in the historical past of the nation, that the fascist may bamboozle the masses.³¹

We Communists are the irreconcilable opponents on principle, of bourgeois nationalism of every variety. But we are not supporters of national nihilism and should never act as such.³²

The Comintern's 1935 resolution on "fascism, working class unity, and the tasks of the Comintern", elaborated:

The communists must in every way combat the fascist falsification of the history of the people, and do everything to enlighten the toiling masses on the past of their own people in an historically correct fashion, in the true spirit of Lenin and Stalin, so as to link up their present struggle with the revolutionary traditions of the past.³³

At least one leader in the Comintern urged the world-wide movement to make a strong appeal for Communist work among intellectuals, explaining past difficulties in that regard as follows: "Our task of winning back the intellectuals was made more difficult because we used to ignore the country's past and the special characteristics its history had produced."³⁴ The Comintern's 1935 embrace of "national traditions" was accepted by every Communist Party, with the result that Communist historians in every country shifted gears. Raphael Samuel has recently acknowledged the importance of the Popular Front strategy in explaining the nationalist tinge of Marxist historiography in Britain during the thirties:

The radical-democratic strain in English Marxism was powerfully, and to some extent deliberately renewed in the 1930s with the Popular Front turn in Communist politics.... Communists, in this period, set about deliberately fostering a sense of democratic heritage.... In line, historically, with the broad democratic alliance which the party was attempting to build, class struggles ... were presented as fights for freedom, and, as in liberal-radical history, the focus of attention was on 'the common people' rather than the industrial working class.³⁵

Thus, it is no surprise that the first comprehensive Marxist history of Britain, written by A.L. Morton -- which incidentally was an influence on Ryerson -- was entitled A People's History of England when it was published in 1938.

Similarly, in his review of "American Marxist Historiography, 1900-1940," Paul Buhle explains why the years before

the Popular Front period did not generate much Communist historical work in the U.S.

The early years of the depression brought a considerable influx of college educated and middle class individuals into the Communist movement. Yet ... few became Marxist historians. ... the doctrinaire attitude taken by the Communists until the mid-1930s did very little to encourage the study of peculiarly American conditions and history: rather, general "exposure" of exploitation and admonition to action served. ... The potential of Communist historiography was decisively changed and reshaped by the sharp changes in the Communist movement after 1934. During the next decade, with the exception of several years (those of opposition to the war effort -BM), the Party sought to fuse its destiny with that of American liberal political tradition.³⁶

Buhle analyzed the writings of Earl Browder, the leader of the American Communist Party, explaining that during the Popular Front period, Browder personally

led Communist utilization of historical analogy for current political purposes. Particularly Browder was fascinated by the events of the American Revolution and the critical years to the end of Jefferson's administration: Here were the major ingredients for any revolutionary political analysis, including incendiary agitation, conspiracy, treason, suppression of civil liberties, and successful radical statesmanship. (After this -BM) ... Communist historiography never returned fully to the clear class-struggle orientation of the Third Period: henceforth, in its elaboration, the work would retain a modicum of respect for bourgeois heroes like Jefferson and Lincoln and for "progressive" but non-revolutionary forces generally.³⁷

Similarly, in a damning comment upon Popular Front historiography, Eugene Genovese has written that

Most American Marxist historians of any reputation come out of the generation of the 1930s. The

depression helped forge them as Communists, but the advance of fascism and the threat to the survival of the world's only socialist state in some ways had a more profound impact... The possibility of a fascist victory led them (i.e., Marxists -BM) to seek allies in a defensive Popular Front, which despite rhetoric and appearance generally produced ideological as well as political capitulation to New Deal liberalism. The Communist party's search for an alliance with liberals ... has stressed the possibilities of working with the "progressive" sections of the bourgeoisie against the "reactionary" sections. In practice this policy has meant support for those who have been willing to accede to a modus vivendi with the USSR in return for the sterilization of the revolutionary forces in the world generally.... For American Marxian historiography it has meant a lack of concern with class forces and the process of capitalist development in favour of the pseudo-radical division of historical categories into "progressive" and "reactionary"..... This parlor game ... spiced with leftist jargon and a few words about the masses and the revolutionary heritage, has passed for Marxism.³⁸

Unfortunately, the same harsh judgement is equally applicable to Ryerson's historical writings -- as the following pages demonstrate.

In Canada, the Comintern's Popular Front strategy had the same effect on Marxist historiography as elsewhere, though it has been little discussed by commentators -- probably because of the failure of the CPC to produce virtually any historical work before 1935. Indeed, Canada had no indigenous tradition of popular/radical historiography prior to the depression -- apart from that established by the American Gustavus Myers, with his book The History of Canadian Wealth. By contrast, both Britain and the United States had radical,

and even Marxist, historians writing before the depression.

Following the Seventh Congress, the CPC central committee held its ninth Plenum (in November 1935) during which Stewart Smith commented on the new policy of utilizing historical traditions.-- a policy already being implemented by Canadian Communists:

It is the Communist movement in Canada today that is carrying forward all the best traditions of the Canadian and British, the French Canadian, and the foreign-born people of Canada. Our press and agitation has correctly commenced to show the masses that we are the bearers under the modern conditions of the revolutionary tradition of 1837. We carry forward the traditions of the fight for democratic liberties in Canada and Great Britain under the present day conditions.³⁹

Decades later, Ryerson himself would acknowledge that

Since the 7th Congress of the Communist International (1935), an approach that emphasized national specificities had been integral to the long-term strategy of anti-fascism. The defence of bourgeois-democratic liberties threatened by the onslaught from the right entailed a degree of recognition of the "national question".⁴⁰

In fact, the CPC had not waited long after the Seventh Congress meeting in August, 1935 to begin its historical work.

One of the first articles to be published in the sudden flurry of historico-journalistic pieces carried in the Communist newspaper (The Worker) was Ryerson's "Our Fathers Fought For Our Freedom: L.J. Papineau and 1837," Kealey has written that

As part of the party's discovery of Canadian history ... a series of essays appeared in The Worker in fall 1935 and winter 1935-6. History at its eulogistic best (or worst), these articles ran under titles such as "Heroes from Canada's Past" and "Communists, Bearers of Great Traditions."⁴¹

While these articles could hardly be thought of serious historical analyses, in Ryerson's case, his article became the basis for further work, resulting eventually in the book 1837.⁴²

Following the Comintern's urging and the CPC's new line, Ryerson's article on Papineau explicitly linked the events of the rebellion in Lower Canada and the Communist struggle during the depression:

This struggle which Papineau organized and led in Lower Canada ... was to be the first great fight for liberty in Canada. Glossed over, falsified and distorted too long by mealy mouthed historians steeped in capitalist "respectability", the story of this struggle of our fathers can serve today to rouse us to the struggle of the twentieth century in Canada, for bread, work, liberty and socialism.⁴³

In the spring of 1936, the CPC commenced publishing a new literary/historical magazine geared to attracting intellectuals to the periphery of the Communist Party. New Frontier enabled the Communists to attract young intellectuals like C.B. Macpherson, A.M. Klein, Morley Callaghan, S.D. Clark, and others on the basis of a "unity of the left" effort. The second issue of New Frontier published Ryerson's second historical piece, "God be Thanked for these Rebels!"

In this early version of the argument he would make in his book 1837, Ryerson drew a parallel between the rise of far right wing organizations during the depression and the mobilization of the ruling class a century before:

In the eighteen thirties, the "best families" in Upper Canada, grown uneasy at the rumblings of a down trodden people demanding that privilege be sacrificed to progress, banded themselves together in the "Constitutional Society" to combat subversive tendencies and uphold right and liberty.... At the same time, while mouthing modern sounding phrases about defence of the constitution and the rights of the British people, they proceeded ... to drill the young sons of the Family Compact in military formation in expectation of the day when they might be used against the "mob". The Parallel is striking. (my emphasis).⁴⁴

Ryerson explained that "official history" had distorted, suppressed and stultified "the realities of the first great struggle for democracy in Canada," making it necessary to re-examine the past in order "to achieve a true sense of direction in the current crisis".

The Rebellions of 1837-38 and Popular Front Historiography

The article "God Be Thanked For These Rebels!" not only gave the CPC an historical tradition that it could claim as a precedent for the Popular Front, it also established the basis for Ryerson's subsequent class analysis of the rebellions. For his analogy between the events of the 1830s and the 1930s to fit, several things were necessary. First, the Communists had to be as successful in building the Popular Front as Papineau and Mackenzie had been in building their movement the decade before -- a goal which evaded the Communists. Secondly, the 1837-38 rebellions had to be unambiguously interpreted as the decisive moment in the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Canada, just as the success of the

Popular Front was to be the key to the eventual transition to socialism. If the 1837 rebellion was anything less than a clear-cut bourgeois democratic revolution, the entire analogy would break down. Ryerson unhesitatingly pronounced that

The rising of 1837 was a fight to establish capitalism in Canada and to give power to the industrial capitalist class. It was an inseparable part of the revolutionary era of the European middle class, which fought through revolution after revolution in order to blast away the barriers of feudal landlordism, establish the free market and win political power.⁴⁵

This conception of the rebellions would remain unchanged throughout the next thirty years, being -- in essence -- the basis for Ryerson's analysis in Unequal Union. The rebellions were part of a "bourgeois democratic revolution" led by an industrial capitalist class in opposition to feudal landlordism.

The complexities of the class conflict of 1837-38 were neatly fit into the roles of the 'progressive' industrial capitalist forces and the 'reactionary' feudal ruling class. In the following quote, Ryerson described the forces of feudal landlordism:

The "bastard aristocracy" of the Canadas came into being with the British conquest, and was created as a result of the system of "free grants" of large estates to army officers, speculators, and other choice upper class immigrants.... Among the beneficiaries were merchant capitalists who had enriched themselves by the fur trade, ensconced themselves in power, and gave not a hoot for further industrial progress. The creation of this new landed aristocracy ... constituted an insurmountable obstacle to the further expansion of industry, commerce and the free market which they require.⁴⁶

Ryerson summarized the class struggle of the nineteenth century as one between an aristocratic land-owning Family Compact and a rising industrial capitalist class:

Arrayed against this land-owning, office holding Family Compact, was the increasingly numerous class of industrial capitalists desirous of developing manufacture and trade, and of sharing the power of state in order to guarantee the protection of their interests.

He added that

Not only was there "a numerous and intelligent class of capitalists" awaiting the possibility of developing industry in Canada: year after year shiploads of propertyless proletarians ... were landed at Quebec.

The conclusion, therefore, was inescapable:

The capitalists were there, the propertyless wage workers were there -- but the industrial and commercial stagnation resulting from the octopus grip of the landowning clique smothered all chance of development.

Ryerson summarized his analysis with the comment that

Society's productive forces were in conflict with society's property relations. Either the latter -- embodied in the oligarchy of the Family Compact -- maintained themselves: and the result was economic stagnation. Or else the former -- embodied in the industrial middle class -- gained the upper hand: and that meant revolution.⁴⁷

In this account, there was no room for subtlety.

Ryerson believed he had succeeded in developing "an understanding of the class character of the rising, and its significance for the present generation of Canadians." In his own words,

The struggle for democracy at that time was aimed at the winning of that measure of democracy which modern capitalism requires in the period of ascension. It was waged in order to make possible the development of the productive powers of modern large scale industry in Canada. In this sense it was not . . . a mere sectional, narrow group-struggle, but one which embodied all that was progressive in society as a whole.⁴⁸

Similarly, in the Communist view, the depression era 'struggle for democracy' was aimed at winning the degree of democracy required by the existing productive forces for the development of a socialist mode of production.

On another front, Ryerson linked the rebellion with the depression era by arguing that although "the people" had fought for liberty and freedom, they had been betrayed by the bourgeois leaders of "the nation". It was that betrayal that had created the necessity for the Popular Front the Communists hoped to build. Nevertheless, the rebellion was categorized as a success because of the subsequent achievement of responsible government in 1848.

The year after this article first appeared, Ryerson's first book, entitled 1837, The Birth of Canadian Democracy, was published. Commemorating the 100th anniversary of the rebellions, it launched his Popular Front style interpretation of Canadian history in earnest. In the Foreword he expressed the hope that the book would serve as the beginning of an eventual Communist analysis of Canadian history -- which, of course, it did:

it is intended that this work should serve as a starting point for an enterprise long overdue: the analysis, from the standpoint of Marxism, of our country's history. Here, only the general direction of such a work is indicated, and for a brief period.⁴⁹

Ryerson also admitted that he had foregone the work of doing original research, instead constructing a sort of historico-journalistic interpretation from already existing sources (this of course corresponded with the book's immediately agitational rather than "analytical" or "theoretical" purpose):

In no sense can this claim to be a work of original research. Such a task would be extremely tempting, all the more since the documentary material has been scarcely touched, and next to nothing written on the Rebellion period.... However, the demands and pressures of daily activity in the working class movement in Quebec ... made it out of the question for the present writer to embark on such research.... if ... these pages ... serve as a beginning for others to follow up, they will have justified themselves.⁵⁰

Those same demands and pressures were to prevent Ryerson from completing the first volume of his Marxist analysis of Canadian history for another twenty three years.

Ryerson's 1837 did serve as the starting point in developing a Communist interpretation of Canadian history in several senses. Besides being the first book length piece of historical investigation undertaken by a Communist Party member, it was also a starting point in the sense that it set the methodological pattern for his later books: French Canada, The Founding of Canada and Unequal Union. All of them would be synthetic accounts on historical themes, written through a

selective reading of the available secondary literature.

Finally, 1837 was Ryerson's starting point in the sense that in it he established a perception of the various class forces existing in nineteenth century Canada, -- a perception which would remain the starting point of all his subsequent historical work. In other words, by establishing the class structure existing during Canada's bourgeois democratic revolutions -- as supposedly revealed in the book 1837 -- Ryerson was able to orient all his future research in assessing the historical development of classes within Canada.

Before continuing, I should point out that 1837 was a minor effort in comparison with Ryerson's later Unequal Union. For that reason it is worthy of our attention as an example of the application of the Party line -- in this case the Popular Front strategy -- to historical investigation, rather than as an example of Ryerson's understanding of historical materialism. (That is not to suggest that Ryerson's early analysis of the rebellion is uncontroversial, or that it somehow represents a departure from the orthodox technicist conception of Marxism. Since his Unequal Union account of the rebellion is much better known, a critique of it is presented in Chapter XII. Here the concern is simply to illustrate the political implications of the Popular Front line for Ryerson's historical research.)

Ryerson's motivation in writing 1837 was clear he wanted to resurrect the past establishing a national tradition of democratic struggle the CPC could claim to be the inheritors of, and communicate the Popular Front policies of the Party in

an interesting manner. In the Foreword he drew a direct comparison between the nineteenth century fight for democratic rights and efforts to defend those same rights and liberties during the 1930s. Ryerson cited the example of the Spanish Civil War as evidence that once again "the common people" were rallying to the cause.

Just as in 1837, it was they, ... "yeoman and mechanics", who formed the backbone of the movement led by Mackenzie and Papineau, so once again ... the Canadian working class is proving to be the best and truest defender of liberty, sending the best of her sons to defend Democracy ... on the battlefields of Spain. No more glorious commemoration could the founders of Canadian democracy receive, then that which is being written in living struggle by the Mackenzie-Papineau battalion....⁵¹

Not only was this resurrection of the Canadian democratic tradition by Ryerson supposed to assist in undercutting the "alien" image of the CPC in Canada, but from Chapter I Ryerson emphasized the international character and heritage of the 1837 events.⁵² The entire first chapter was given over to a discussion of how the spirit of the French, English and American revolutions was influential among the leaders of the Canadian rebellion.

In Chapter II ("Land, Capital, State Power") Ryerson introduced the thesis of the book:

The 1837 rebellion was in aim and content an anti-feudal, anti-colonial bourgeois democratic revolution ... waged by the rising capitalist class against the medieval restrictions of feudalism, and for the conquest of democratic rights, state power and independent nationhood.⁵³

Ryerson saw the Canadas as encompassing "two different stages of social evolution" simultaneously. In Lower Canada "the institutions of pre-revolutionary feudal France still remained in existence," while "superimposed upon them, and extending over the Upper province, was a set up dominated by a new merchant-landlord oligarchy, roughly corresponding to the stage of development of the British landlord regime of the eighteenth century."⁵⁴ (In a footnote, Ryerson described that state of development citing the American historian Charles Beard to the effect that England was governed by a "few thousand landlords and merchant capitalists.") Ryerson summarized the class structure existing in the Canadas as "a sort of commercialized feudalism" in which the land monopoly of the ruling groups combined with the colonial connection to Britain blocked indigenous industrial development and created economic stagnation.⁵⁵ Ryerson's second thesis summarizes this view:

Responsible government, the main demand of the Canadian reform movement, was primarily a means to an end: the breaking of colonial and feudal fetters, to allow the economic expansion of an industrial Canada. In this, the aims of the manufacturing class coincided with the general interests of the mass of people; the industrial bourgeoisie played the role of a revolutionary-democratic force.⁵⁶

With the simple contrast between the class bloc which supported industrial development and "progress"⁵⁷ and the reactionary forces whose power insured economic stagnation, the Popular

Front analysis of the class struggle during the depression was reproduced.

Despite his vagueness about "commercialized feudalism" as a mode of production, Ryerson did not hesitate in asserting that the rebels were fighting for industrial capitalism. However, for him the major issues were political democracy and liberty rather than the issues of class exploitation and domination (regardless of the motivations of peasants in Lower Canada). He wrote that

the political issues around which that class struggle centered (were -BM) ... the fight for a government responsible to the people, for popular control of the finances, for civil, religious and national freedom.⁵⁸

In this Popular Front version of the rebellion Ryerson assigned each of the class blocs their respective roles as prescribed in his preconceived model. The rebellion could be nothing more, nor anything less than the bourgeois democratic revolution required by the Party line.

As in his two previous accounts of the rebellion, Ryerson identified the struggle as a simple two-sided one. On the one side was the reactionary landowning aristocracy and colonial apparatus which embodied the old outmoded relations of production, on the other was the progressive bloc of class forces headed by the industrial bourgeoisie representing the newly developed forces of production.

(Ryerson actually referred to this latter group alternately

as an "industrial bourgeoisie", a "commercial and professional middle class", a "manufacturing class", and so on.) Ryerson's analysis presents a host of unaccounted for problems -- most of which I will deal with in discussing his 1968 account of the rebellion. But to illustrate how his Popular Front interpretation undermined the accuracy of his 1937 book, we will examine this idea that there were two unified class blocs in opposition during the rebellion.

By not making any allowance for the conflict of class interests within each of his class blocs, Ryerson misrepresented the character of the struggle in Lower Canada, and failed to adequately explain the defeat of the rebels. In his account, the defeat in Lower Canada could be attributed to the defection of the right wing of the reform movement in the years leading up to 1837, the poor organization and co-ordination of the leadership and its defensive military strategy.⁵⁹ In all of this, the bitter disagreements within the ranks of the Patriotes over the question of the seigneurial tenure simply disappears.

Ryerson had noted Lord Durham's comment to the effect that many peasants who fought for the rebels believed the overthrow of the feudal burdens to be imminent. Yet he completely ignored the manner in which the disagreements on this issue split the ranks of the Patriotes during the rebellion.⁶⁰ Perhaps a little too anxious to make the chief

offender -- the Patriote leader Papineau -- into an ultra democrat (it must be recalled that the CPC had named its contingent in the war to defend democracy from fascism in Spain the "Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion"), Ryerson was attacked in a review by Donald Creighton. Criticizing Ryerson's admission to having done no original research, Creighton wrote

The Canadian Tories, in order that they may fit the role which Mr. Ryerson is determined to assign to them, are described as a reactionary landlord-merchant class, devoted to feudalism and opposed to industrial growth. The Canadian reformers, by an even more violent transformation, are made to assume the character of an industrial bourgeoisie, eager for the development of manufacturing, opposed to feudalism and mercantilism and convinced of the utility of free trade. As a matter of fact, the principal attempts to reform the seigniorial system were made not by the French Canadian patriotes, but by the merchants in Lower Canada and the imperial authorities in London.⁶¹

Creighton had identified one of the many weak spots in Ryerson's glorification of the Patriotes and its leader Papineau -- the latter's support of the system of seigniorial tenure. This attack forced Ryerson, in his book French Canada, to admit that

When we turn to the question of feudal tenure it becomes apparent that the position of the Patriotes ... was at times less fully consistent than their stand on the central issue of responsible government.⁶²

Ryerson simply demotes the importance of this class dimension of the struggle in accordance with the idea that in reality the colonial connection with Britain was more important. Nevertheless, his admission undercuts his efforts to present

the rebels as simply a bloc of harmonious classes each acting in concert, to the same end. In response to Creighton's attack, Ryerson writes,

There is no question but that the vast majority of the French-Canadian Reformers desired the abolition of feudalism. They expressed that desire in their protests against the reactionary provisions of the Québec Act of 1774, in the program of the Constitution Club of 1791, and in the 1838 Declaration of Independence of Lower Canada....⁶³

With this comment, Ryerson establishes the issue of seigneurial tenure as one which had at least a sixty year history. (By contrast with the brief history of the agitation for colonial independence). Yet he did not place this class issue at the center of his analysis, preferring to give precedence to the issue of responsible government and national independence -- the fight for capitalist democracy. The struggles of the underclasses had to be kept away from the center of analysis because they threatened the popular front interpretation of the rebellions.

As for Papineau's stand on the question of seigneurial tenure, Ryerson accounted for it in the following way:

Papineau ... himself a seigneur, refused to accept the abolition of the tenure in his program, and parted company with Robert Nelson on this question in 1838. "I am a great reformer in regard to the necessary political changes," he declared on one occasion in the Assembly, "but I am a great conservative in regard to the sacred right of property." This inconsistency was able to persist, in Papineau's position, only because of the fact that during this period the political issues of colonial self-government and French Canadian national

rights tended to overshadow the economic agrarian issue; and because, moreover, this political struggle in Lower Canada was broadly national in character, involving large sections of all classes except for the few place-holders bought over by the oligarchy -- and the Church leadership.⁶⁴

As is customary, Ryerson's assertion that the political aspect of the struggle for responsible government and/or political independence took precedence over the class dimension is unsubstantiated. Recent research by Daniel Salée -- among others -- now casts grave doubts on the argument that the rebellion in Lower Canada should be explained primarily in terms of the national or colonial questions. And as if the grievances of the underclasses were of little consequence.⁶⁵

In his Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840, S.D. Clark stresses that the attack on the seigneurial system of tenure rents and duties was popular among the habitants, besides leading to the split between Papineau and the radical Patriotes. He also notes that following Nelson's 1838 Declaration of Independence for Lower Canada, in which the abolition of seigneurial tenure was declared, the habitants refused to pay their rents.⁶⁶

In Lower Canada 1791-1849: Social Change and Nationalism, Fernand Ouellet explains that the split between Papineau and the leader of the radical Patriotes, Nelson, stemmed from differences over the abolition of seigneurial tenure. In the wake of the defeat of the first rebellion in late 1837,

differences quickly arose between the Papineau supporters and the radicals, the latter attributing

the defeat to the leader's (i.e., Papineau -BM) flight and even more to the revolutionary programme's lack of attraction for the peasants. There developed a rupture over the abolition of seigneurial dues, the *Coutume de Paris*, and tithing -- in other words, not over strategy but over basic ideology. ... An influential minority of *patriotes* ... (from Papineau's faction -BM) were deeply worried over the danger of a social revolution.... They ... feared losing control of the revolution to the radicals; to the advantage of the common people and to their own detriment.⁶⁷

Because the rupture between the radicals and the conservatives took place only after the first rebellion had failed, the subsequent efforts of the radicals to rally the peasantry around an insurrection dedicated to the abolition of the feudal tenure was fought with difficulties. As Ouellet describes the predicament,

The radicals' attempts to direct popular discontent against the government, the seigneurs, and the clergy began to reach the lower classes in certain regions only after revolution became a reality, and even then the proselytizers were too few to produce the full effect hoped for. ... The rupture between Papineau's conservatives and the radicals gave the latter the upper hand in the second rebellion. Nelson's declarations of independence in February and November of 1838 proclaimed abolition of the old social regime and also universal suffrage, appealing directly to the urban and rural proletariat. But ... the attempt to rouse the masses against the old social regime met with only partial success.⁶⁸

Creighton's comments also forced Ryerson to admit that

Actually, the abolition of the feudal tenure was advocated by both the French Canadian *Patriotes* and the English Canadian merchant oligarchy: though from very different motives, and in connection with diametrically opposed political programs. The Montreal merchants desired it in the general interests of commercial expansion -- and to that extent they

represented the forces of capitalist progress; but they desired it most immediately as a means of facilitating speculation in capitalist land monopoly, and as part of a political program of suppression of French Canadian rights and mercantile subordination of Canada to the imperial metropolis.⁶⁹

This represents a major concession, since 1837 had argued that the merchant class in the early nineteenth century Canadas was completely reactionary. The 'facts' of a bourgeois historian were forcing Ryerson to present a less rigid interpretation of the class realities of the rebellion.

To conclude, Ryerson cast his interpretation of the events of 1837-38 in the mould of the CPC's Popular Front strategy, virtually eliminating the distinctive class forces at play in the process. The underclasses, which were assigned a strictly subordinate role in Stalinist theory, had the same role assigned to them in Ryerson's account. The important figures in Ryerson's 1837 ... were the two leaders of the 'progressive' forces, Papineau and Mackenzie.

Ryerson's 1937 version of the rebellion was a classic case of historical research made useful, in accordance with the doctrine of partiinost. Yet it was the only Canadian product of the Comintern's suggestion that its member Parties "link up their present struggle with the revolutionary traditions of the past."⁷⁰ Few Communists apart from Ryerson even reflected on the need to develop a Marxist historiography. One of the exceptions was John Weir, a leading figure in the Ukrainian section of the CPC. In a 1944 article entitled

"Notes on the Study of our History" he discussed the historiographic tasks of Canadian Communists in terms which further illustrate the importance of the notion of partiinost to Ryerson's work.⁷¹

In his rejection of virtually all Canadian historical writing except that done by Ryerson (being the two books 1837 and French Canada, at that point in time), Weir dismissed not only bourgeois history, but even the work of Gustavus Myers. The latter was criticized as a moralistic and muckraking effort to document the history of Canadian business as "one unbroken chain of robbery." Myers' work was useful because he provided "important source materials", just like some orthodox history books. But Weir rejected both the bourgeois and moralistic approaches to history on the grounds that neither could

portray the real history, the social forces operating behind and through the individual "makers of history" the movements of classes and peoples....⁷²

But the real purpose of the article -- published in the same issue of NAM as another article entitled "Tehran and America" by Earl Browder -- was to urge Party members to follow Ryerson's 1937 example (with the publication of the book 1837) and find historical material to bolster the new Party line on the possibility of a post-war world of a peaceful and prosperous capitalism. In a classic demonstration of the veracity of Penner's comments regarding the Stalinist tendency to confound theory and tactics subordinating the former to the latter, Weir wrote

If in the period of deepening general crisis we "discovered" our own Canadian revolution of 1837, today we must deepen our study of Canadian history to uncover not only the "stormy" but also the "peaceful" pages. Today, when we are faced with "compromise" not only as a temporary tactical question but as a problem of maintaining national unity (i.e., compromise between classes) for a whole historical epoch, we cannot afford to neglect the study of similar "compromises" in previous chapters of the history of our country.⁷³

A more blatant advocacy of the need to marshal history to bolster the current Party line, irrespective of philosophical historical and methodological principles, cannot be imagined.

And in case Kealey or others believe Weir's article to be an exception to the ideal of Canadian Communists -- let alone Stanley Ryerson -- remember that this article was published in a journal under Ryerson's editorial control, without critical response. His silence bespeaks his agreement. But that is not all, for Weir had plenty to say about Ryerson's writings. His comments substantiate the argument that I have been making throughout this section:

It was no accident that in the 30's the Communist movement in Canada "discovered" Mackenzie and Papineau and the revolution of 1837. Capitalism was in the throes of a general crisis, and revolutionary consciousness was developing among a general section of the Canadian workers. The parallel with 1837 was apparent; not that history was repeating itself but that in a different period of history great popular struggles stood on the agenda.

It was at this period that Stanley B. Ryerson gave us 1837 -- The Birth of Canadian Democracy.... There were lessons drawn from that history of 1837 which played a part in lighting the road for 1937 -- when revolutionary Canadian workers bore the banner of Mackenzie and Papineau to the Battle of Spain.⁷⁴

Ryerson's failure to refute Weir's contention is adequate proof that 1837 had indeed been written to bolster the Communist Party's Popular Front Policy. (It also refutes any suggestion that 1837 might have been the result of work arrived at 'independently' of the Party line. Ryerson was writing the Party line rather than simply following it, but the part he was writing amounted to filling in Canadian actors for a script and parts written in Moscow, and designed to achieve class collaboration in favour of Soviet foreign policy.)

Perhaps I should add that John Weir was a very well-known and leading figure in the Canadian Communist Party (lending credibility to the notion that his conception of theory and history in the service of the party line was commonly accepted by Canadian Communists). Having been to the prestigious Lenin school in Moscow during the late 1920s (together with Leslie Morris and Stewart Smith), Weir was an important figure in the leadership of the Party.⁷⁵

1837 demonstrates that Ryerson was not simply a partisan Marxist historian, but actually a Stalinist Party official putting history to work for the Party. As the historian David Montgomery (himself a former member of the American Communist Party) has explained, the ritualistic repetition of the slogan that "theory was a guide to action" did not prevent Marxism under Stalin from de-generating into a dogma:

The official intellectual life of the party ... was stifling. In spite of the familiar slogan, "Marxism is a guide to action, not a dogma," theory appeared at that level of the movement in the form of explanations of official texts or even ex post facto justifications of actions taken, and not as a rigorous method of analyzing and changing social realities.⁷⁶

In another context, a former member of the British Communist Party has described the restrictions placed on the scope of internal 'theoretical' debate within the Party

The attitude taken by the Party leadership towards discussion had the effect, and almost certainly the intention, of requiring unanimity in thought as well as in action. (They -BM) ... never ceased to tell us that the only purpose of discussion was

action. But action itself was interpreted narrowly. It usually meant some immediate action by the Party branch: holding a meeting ... issuing a leaflet... (etc. -BM) Since all discussion took place on a 'political report', covering 'the situation', and had then to lead to action, no real discussion on political theory or principle was possible, except in education-classes or specialist professional or cultural groups (like the historians' group in the CPGB -BM). (Ruled out was the possibility -BM) ... that all discussion need not lead to action, but could have other aims, such as clarification of ideas, gaining a deeper understanding of a political problem, getting at the facts, changing policy, or even changing the leadership.⁷⁷

For Ryerson, as for Stalinist intellectuals throughout the international Communist movement, adherence to the politics inherent in the Moscow line of the moment took precedence over intellectual and theoretical principles. Theory existed only for the purposes of rationalizing and bolstering the practical interests of Stalin's foreign policy within a particular national context. In that sense, 1837 was an elaborate exercise in polemics rather than historical writing.

In his book Communism and British Intellectual Neil Wood gives a lengthy but nonetheless brilliant description of the process by which an intellectual was transformed into propagandist, no longer capable of acting in accordance with any intellectual principles. It deserves to be quoted in full:

The pattern of thought and outlook of the intellectual changes as he is gradually integrated into the party. First his adherence to the Party line is required. This he finds much more difficult than the worker (who joins a Stalinist Party, because -BM) ... he is deeply committed to certain values that stand outside the Party and the Party line. ... as an artist he is

committed to beauty. Since the trusted Party member can have only one supreme value, loyalty to the Party and a belief in Marxism Leninism, to which all other values must be subordinated, there immediately arises the problem of the conflict of values.... Sooner or later a decision must be made as to which values will dominate.

As a newcomer to communism the intellectual may look upon an act or particular policy of the Party as an end in itself, designed to benefit mankind here and now.... After he has remained in the Party for any great length of time, he may begin to notice that the policies which he had espoused in his early days of membership have since been rejected.... He gradually learns that ... an act of the Communist Party can never be judged by its immediate consequences, but by the contribution that it makes toward (the) ultimate goal. The intellectual who accepts this approach begins increasingly to focus his attention upon the future to the neglect of the present. Since the communist millenium exists only as a dim constellation of ideas and ideals, and since he views the present in terms of this abstraction, reality becomes no more than a series of highly stylized abstractions.... The abstraction of the present (and of the past -BM) in terms of an abstraction of the future profoundly influences his action. If the present (and the past -BM) is considered important only as an avenue to the future, then the main task is one of clearing the way, of removing everybody and everything that may impede the inevitable march of history.... Nothing possesses a value in itself; but only as it stands in relation to the future commonwealth....

The intellectual who manages to survive a number of Party crises must make one more adjustment.... Since the criterion of thought and action is its usefulness to the cause of communism, who is to be judge? The answer is simply that judgement must be rendered by those best qualified to use Marxism-Leninism.... By definition these can only be the present leaders of international communism.... Once the intellectual begins to believe that all actions and pronouncements of the communist hierarchy are for the ultimate interest of mankind, he has secured himself against all possible changes in the Party line.... At this moment he ceases to be an intellectual, a creator of ideas, and becomes a retailer of the ideas of others and a manufacturer of slogans. He no

longer searches for the truth; he begins with the truth as revealed in the pronouncements of the Party leaders. It is his job to juggle with words, facts, and ideas so as to support this truth. The communist intellectual is an ideologist.... When he becomes a good communist, one above all reproach, and thereby ceases to be an intellectual, he is often a member of the body of black-coats, who are either paid functionaries of the Party or of Party supported organizations. He thereby gains a material as well as a spiritual stake in the Party. It is now too late to retreat. Having ceased to be an intellectual, he becomes a communist bureaucrat.⁷⁸

Having assumed his position among the ranks of the Party bureaucrats, Ryerson would prove himself as one of the Party's most dedicated Stalinists, even after Stalinism itself was finally discredited by Kruschchev.

In the last chapter we demonstrated that Ryerson adhered to the technicist interpretation of Marxism. In this chapter we established that he engaged in the Stalinist practice of writing history to suit the momentary tactical needs of the Communist movement. In the next chapter we discuss the most ambitious project Ryerson ever undertook: the task of writing a People's History of Canada.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER IX

1. see The American Communist Party: A Critical History by Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, Praeger, 1962, pages 176-180, also see The Popular Front of the 1930s, and particularly, the Introduction by Jack Trautman, International Socialists, no date.
2. see Howe and Coser, pp. 177-180.
3. see T. Draper's article "The Strange Case of the Comintern", Survey, Vol. 18, 1972, p. 132.
4. in The Communist International 1919-1943 Documents, ed. by Jane Degras, Oxford University Press, three volumes, 1965, see Vol. III, p. 44.
5. see Trotsky's The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany, Penguin Books, 1971.
6. see Degras, Vol. III, p. 152.
7. Howe and Coser, op. cit., p. 189.
- 7a. see Socialism and the C.C.F., by G. Pierce (psuedonym of Stewart Smith), Contemporary Publishing Association, 1934.
- 7b. see Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada, by Ian Angus, Vanguard Publications, Montreal, 1981, especially chapters 14 and 15.
- 7c. ibid., p. 264.
- 7d. ibid., p. 274.
- 7e. ibid., p. 285.
8. Communist Politics in Britain, by Hugo Dewar, Pluto Press, 1976, pp. 78 and 89.
9. Howe and Coser, p. 188.
10. see The Popular Front of the 1930s, pp. 1-2 and 17-19.
11. see Borkeneau, p. 386.
12. see The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform, by Fernando Claudin, Penguin Books, 1975, pages 174-199.
13. see The Mandate of Heaven: Marx and Mao in Modern China, by Nigel Harris, Quartet Books, 1978, p. 244.
14. Claudin, op. cit., pp. 184-5.

15. Trautman, op. cit., p. i.
16. Howe and Coser, p. 320.
17. Claudin pp. 193-4.
18. see Ivan Avakumovic's The Communist Party in Canada, McClelland and Stewart, 1975, p. 90.
19. The Communist..., pp. 126-7.
20. for information on the role of intellectuals in the CPC, see Avakumovic, pp. 126-7.
21. see Ryerson's "Comrade Beth", in Bethune: The Montreal Years, ed. Wendell MacLeod, Libbie Park and Stanley Ryerson, Lorimer, 1978, p. 146.
22. Communism and the British Intellectuals, by Neal Wood, Columbia University Press, 1959, pp. 41-2.
23. Ryerson, "Comrade Beth", pp. 155-6.
24. see Neal Wood's Communism and British Intellectuals, Columbia University Press, 1959, p. 42.
25. Howe and Coser, pp. 273-318.
26. *ibid.*, pp. 283-4.
27. see The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis, by Norman Penner, Prentice Hall of Canada, 1977, p. 120.
28. see Kealey's "Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson: Canadian Revolutionary Intellectual", paper presented to the Canadian Political Science Association annual meetings, May 1981, p. 32.
29. Penner, The Canadian..., p. 82.
30. in The United Front, by Georgi Dimitrov, Proletarian Publishers, 1975, pp. 80-1.
31. Penner, The Canadian..., p. 106.
32. *ibid.*
33. Degras, Vol. III, p. 366.
34. *ibid.*, 389.

35. see Raphael Samuel's article "British Marxist Historian, 1880-1980: Part One", in New Left Review, #120, pp. 37, 41-2.
36. see "American Marxist Historiography, 1900-1940", by Paul Buhle, in Radical America, Vol. 4, #8-9, November 1970, pp. 17 and 20.
37. ibid., pp. 20-1.
38. see Eugene Genovese's "Marxian Interpretations of the Slave South," in Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History, ed. by Barton Bernstein, Pantheon Books, p. 91.
39. Penner, p. 106.
40. "American Communism in Crisis: 1943-56" review article by Stanley Ryerson, in Canadian Forum, Vol. 52, Feb. 1973, pp. 40-2.
41. see Kealey's "Stanley..." p. 16.
42. Kealey acknowledges this in ibid., pp. 3-4.
43. see Ryerson's "Our Fathers Fought for our Freedom: L.J. Papineau and 1837", The Worker, Sept. 28th, 1935.
44. see Ryerson's "God Be Thanked for These Rebels!", in New Frontier, Vol. 1, #2, p. 6.
45. ibid., p. 6.
46. ibid., p. 7.
47. ibid.
48. ibid., p. 8.
49. see Ryerson's 1837: The birth of Canadian Democracy, Francis White Publishers, 1937, pp. 10-11.
50. ibid., p. 13.
51. ibid., p. 10.
52. ibid., pp. 12-13.
53. ibid., p. 26.
54. ibid., pp. 26-7.

55. *ibid.*, pp. 35, 37-44.
56. *ibid.*, p. 47.
57. *ibid.*, p. 37.
58. *ibid.*, p. 47.
59. *ibid.*, pp. 127-130.
60. *ibid.*, p. 27-28.
61. *ibid.*, p. 73; also see Creighton's review of 1837...., in Canadian Historical Review, Vol. 19, 1938, pp. 73-4.
62. see Ryerson's French Canada: A Study in Canadian Democracy, Progress Books, 1980, p. 48.
63. *ibid.*
64. *ibid.*, p. 49.
65. see an unpublished paper by Daniel Salée, "Fetichisme, Analyse Historique et la Question Nationale: Le Cas Des Insurrections de 1837-1838 Au Quebec," a paper presented at the 1981 meetings of the Canadian Political Science Association.
66. Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840, by S.D. Clark, University of Toronto Press, 1959, pp. 320-322.
67. see Lower Canada 1791-1840: Social Change and Nationalism, McClelland and Stewart, 1980, pp. 339-341.
68. *ibid.*, pp. 325-6.
69. Ryerson, French Canada, pp. 48-9.
70. see World Communism, by Franz Borkeneau, Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1971, p. 519.
71. see "Notes on the Study of Our History", by John Weir, NAM Vol. 1, #4, 1944.
72. *ibid.*, p. 117.
73. *ibid.*
74. *ibid.*, p. 116.

75. see Avakumovic, p. 63, and also see John Kolasky's The Shattered Illusion, PMA Books, 1979.
76. see "Once Upon a Shop Floor: An Interview with David Montgomery," in Radical History Review #23, p. 39.
77. see Malcolm MacEwen's "The Day the Party Had to Stop," in Socialist Register 1976, Merlin Press, pp. 37-8.
78. see Wood, Communism and British..., pp. 217-221.

CHAPTER X

RYERSON AND THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF CANADA PROJECT

The same preoccupation with theoretical orthodoxy which had led to the publication of A World to Win after the downfall of Earl Browder in the United States, prompted the CPC to launch a "campaign to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Marxism." As Party leader Tim Buck explained: "the theoretical level of our political work as a Party, (and -BM) the level of theoretical understanding of the membership of our Party, is too low."¹ The campaign would include the re-establishment of a system of provincial and national training schools, the publication of material enabling rank-and-file Communists to study the application of basic Marxism to Canadian circumstances (this led to the publication of A World to Win), and the establishment of a series of research projects on Canadian labour history, Canadian imperialism, and Canadian history in general. The whole campaign was to be topped off with the publication of Canada: The Communist Viewpoint² by Tim Buck.

In a long article in the February/March 1947 issue of Club Life (a Communist Party publication) Ryerson explained some of the motivation behind the 100th anniversary campaign: to raise the theoretical level of the CP's membership "The period ahead is destined to be one of such immense struggles,

that we must banish once and for all any and every tendency to theoretical sleep walking among our hardworking comrades."³

Ryerson particularly drew attention to the importance of producing Canadian material that could be used to upgrade the Party's theoretical level.

The man most responsible for the campaign within the Party was Stanley Ryerson: he set up the training schools, wrote A World to Win, acted as the Party's overall co-ordinator and director of research, besides eventually taking personal and direct responsibility for that portion of the project concerned with Canadian history in general -- what would become known as the "People's History of Canada" project.

Testimony to Ryerson's role in the Party's post-war theoretical offensive can be found in a 1949 document prepared by the National Educational Department of the LPP; it said that

During 1946-47 Comrade Ryerson bore the main brunt of the big task of carrying through the major struggle for a complete turn towards Party education work, setting up the education apparatus nationally and throughout the country, and organizing and carrying through the National School project.⁴

In surveying the way in which 'class' has been used in Canadian historiography, Kealey identified the People's History of Canada project headed by Ryerson as one of the two developments which have fostered an indigenous tradition of Marxist historiography in the post-war period (the other being, of course, the work of academics like C. B. Macpherson and H. Clare Pentland). As he puts it, one

promising development of the late 1940's (i.e., in the development of an indigenous tradition of Canadian Marxist historiography -BM), which was not to bear fruit for almost twenty years, was a new commitment on the part of the Communist Party to a scholarly inquiry into Canadian History.⁵

Kealey nevertheless admits -- though he fails to explain -- that the efforts of Canadian Communists on the "Peoples' History of Canada" project provided only "bits and pieces of historical analysis ... compared to the analagous tradition (of Communist Historiography -BM) in Western Europe, England or even the United States."⁶

The comparison of the Canadian CP with the Parties in Britain and the United States is quite common. And it is indeed useful to compare the theoretical record of the Canadian Party with that of the CPGB and the CPUSA. Not surprisingly then, Kealey compares the historical work done by members of the CPGB Historians' Group with that done by the CPC's Peoples' History project,⁷ in his recent paper on Ryerson. The comparison is partially undermined by the relative absence of intellectuals in the Canadian Party (as compared with the CPGB). Kealey has correctly pinpointed that Ryerson's rapid rise in the Party hierarchy is partially explained by that absence of intellectuals in the CPC. For that reason, the CPC's major historian also played a political role within the Party, unlike that of the major historians in the British and American Communist Parties. As Kealey summarizes it,

Ryerson played a role in the political history of Canadian communism unlike that of his American or British counterparts. Herbert Aptheker and Philip Foner, for example, go unmentioned in the major works on the history of the CPUSA. Eric Hobsbawm has noted that none of the members of the Historians Group of the CPGB, with the exception of E.P. Thompson, were "politically important enough to be elected to his District Party Committee."⁸

Kealey recognizes the unique character of Ryerson's role within the Communist Party, being simultaneously a major Party leader and its only significant historian:

Ryerson's political responsibilities left him far less time for the tasks of writing history (than Communist historians in the British and American Parties -BM). Yet ... he has managed nevertheless to produce a significant shelf of historical work. Indeed one can only wonder how much he would have produced with the university scholar's rather different priorities. The onerous duties of Party work did have their costs and, for example, prevented extensive archival work. Thus Ryerson's historical writing has always been that of a Marxist synthesizer. He took the work available to him and recast it in a historical materialist mould.⁹

Kealey's insinuation that Ryerson's historical writings might have been even more impressive had he been relieved of the "onerous duties of Party work" by a lesser demand on the very few Party intellectuals seems odd. Apart from the rather elitist denigration of the work involved in building a political Party, Kealey forgets that Stanley Ryerson was already a major figure in the leadership of the Canadian CP when he began doing historical work with the publication of 1837 and French Canada. He was not a professional historian by training, but became a historian when the Party required an

intellectual capable of creating an historical tradition for the CPC during the Popular Front period. He was, and remained a Party leader turned historian, out of a Party need for historical analysis which no one else seemed interested in or capable of.

By ignoring this fact -- that Ryerson was a Party leader and intellectual doing some historical work, rather than an historian who had assumed a position of importance in the Party hierarchy -- Kealey fails to understand the limitations of comparing Ryerson's work and that of Communist historians in the CPGB. This is well illustrated (in the discussion below) when we realize that Ryerson could envisage completing the People's History of Canada project without doing any original research. A Party leader turned part-time historian out of necessity had very different priorities from those professional historians in the British CP. In fact, his entire conception of history was an extension of the notion of partiinost, rather than a view which saw historical work as having some intrinsic value.

In his account of the Historians' group in the British CP, Hobsbawm emphasizes the self-sufficiency and relative independence of the group within the Party. Perhaps because an authoritative Communist history of Britain had already been published before the group was formed (i.e., A.L. Morton's A People's History of England) or maybe because the historians

group was only one of many such groups of intellectuals in the CPGB, the leadership of the British CP did not exercise tight control over the group.¹⁰ As Hobsbawm has explained, British Communist historians

on the whole ... did not feel any sense of constraint, of certain matters being off limits, nor did we feel that the Party tried to interfere with or distort our work as Communist historians. This may appear surprising, for during those years of ultra-rigid Stalinism ... the Party line ... was only too likely to extend deeply into matters which at first sight had no evident relation to politics.... Politics then often insisted a priori on the 'correct' interpretation, which it was the business of Marxist theory to 'prove', i.e. to confirm. There is no doubt that ... our arguments were sometimes designed a posteriori to confirm what we already knew to be necessarily 'correct', especially in our discussions on Absolutism and the English revolution.¹¹

The picture here is of a self-regulating group of Party intellectuals churning out historical research on topics of their own choosing. While Hobsbawm quite candidly admits that historical research was often shaped to prove the correctness of the Party line on some matter, this seems to have been the product of conviction rather than the direction of the Party leadership. Hobsbawm's account of the position of the historians in the CPGB is partially explained by a phenomenon described by Howe and Coser in their history of the CPUSA. They argue that although there was a significant gap between the experience of freedom felt by Party intellectuals and the reality of the narrowly dogmatic confines within which they worked, they were not subjected to

Party directives specifying the content of every intellectual product:

in what the party regarded as trivial matters concerning taste there was no occasion to police the intellectuals and that in important political matters (such as defending the current line or attacking the deviationists) there was no need to: they could be trusted to police themselves.¹²

Hobsbawm himself accounts for the relative intellectual freedom of the British Communist historians by explaining that there was no existing Party line on most of British history, and historians tended to avoid areas in which there was such a Party line (for example the history of the Soviet Union, or twentieth century British history). Moreover, a good deal of energy was expended in attacking bourgeois historians while absolutely untenable theoretical postulates of Stalinism -- such as the claim that the post-war working class was experiencing an absolute drop in its standard of living (the "absolute immiseration of the working class") -- were simply ignored.

All of this stands in very sharp contrast to the rigidly controlled and leadership directed work of the CPC's People's History group. The historical research which would form the basis for the eventual publication of The Founding of Canada and Unequal Union was not the product of Communist Party historians left to their own devices. Rather it was a Party initiated and Party directed effort to write a completely orthodox and politically correct interpretation of

Canada's history. To appreciate the extent to which Ryerson's two most famous books are the product of a strict partiinost approach to theory, we have to trace out the project's history.

As early as 1944, the idea of writing a People's History of Canada was current among the leadership of the CPC. In that year, John Weir had called for the establishment of "a History Committee in conjunction with the Educational Department ... as a means of co-ordinating and stimulating work in this field."¹⁴ But it was only in the aftermath of the Party's difficulties with Browderism that Canadian Communists actually launched a concerted effort to write a Communist version of Canada's history.

The People's History project was launched with an announcement for an upcoming conference "on the study of Canadian historical development," in the October 1946 issue of NAM. The ad acknowledged the theoretical weaknesses of the Marxist movement in Canada, maintaining that it had "long suffered from the lack of adequate basic materials on the Canadian economy and state, studied in their historic development". The CP's conference was calculated to remedy this situation, by bring(ing) together workers in the field of economic and political studies, research and historical writing, and provide an opportunity for planning the production of a number of papers, pamphlets and books during 1947-48.¹⁵

The agenda for the conference was published in November, and read as follows:

1. Canadian History as viewed by bourgeois ideology and by Marxism -- an introductory report by Stanley B. Ryerson.
2. Project of Marxist Studies: presentation of draft proposals: Margaret Fairley.
3. The 100th anniversary of Marxism: An address by Tim Buck.
4. General discussion: communications from outside points.
5. Adoption of decisions on plan of work.¹⁶

The conference was held in accordance with a decision taken at the LPP's convention during the summer of 1946, ostensibly "to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist movement and the publication of the Communist Manifesto." The conference itself was to act as a catalyst in planning and preparing "new material on Canadian history and the study of Canadian imperialism," and to lay the basis for the "production of a popular Marxist history of Canada, a history of the labour movement and of the Communist movement, and studies on Canadian monopoly capitalism."¹⁷

The February (1947) issue of National Affairs Monthly reported that the conference had instituted a "continuing project" to study Canadian economic and political development, to be chaired by Stanley Ryerson. Committees had been established to supervise theoretical work within three broad areas: "On People's History of Canada", "On History of Canadian Labour", and "On Study of Canadian Imperialism". The whole project was under the general supervision of Stanley Ryerson, with the People's History of Canada project -- covering

the period until the rise of Canadian imperialism in the late nineteenth century -- eventually coming under his immediate control.

Ryerson's contribution to the conference -- a talk on the state of bourgeois historiography -- was published in NAM under the title "Marxism and the Writing of Canadian History." It both laid out some basic assumptions about the type and amount of work involved in producing the projected People's History of Canada, and presented a critique of bourgeois historiography. We will discuss the latter below, but first we need to discuss the general plan for the project. In the article, Ryerson stressed the need for Communist Party members to

strive harder to master historical materialism, as the one conception which can enable us to interpret successfully the lines of Canadian development. We must learn to master that critical method which is of the essence of historical materialism: particularly in view of the fact that by far the greater part of our work will of necessity be based on the materials and data provided by bourgeois historians and economists.¹⁸

Implicit in this passage is the belief that once armed with the science of historical materialism (which gave the Communist a predetermined theoretical and methodological knowledge of "those general laws of movement that govern the historical process"), it would simply be necessary to sift through the "materials and data" already "provided by bourgeois historians and economists" in order to write the

"People's History of Canada."¹⁹ Ryerson's approach to the project flowed from his orthodox Stalinist perspective of dialectical and historical materialism as a methodology that equipped him with a set of theoretical postulates that would enable him to transform the work of bourgeois social scientists into an adequate Marxist account of Canadian history. This view implied a number of assumptions: that bourgeois historians and social scientists had gathered all the essential information required to write a Marxist history of Canada, and that the only thing missing was the theory to organize it. In other words, Ryerson assumed that there was an essential disjuncture between theory and facts, such that the fact gathering efforts of bourgeois social scientists would be adequate despite their efforts having been informed by non-Marxist theories. That Ryerson should hold such a view is not surprising, given the similarity of the Stalinist conception of production to that made popular in bourgeois ideology (as illustrated in our earlier discussion on Stalin). On the other hand, it should also be apparent that any attempt to write a history of Canada informed by Marx's materialist conception of history -- as opposed to Stalin's bastardized rendition of it -- would involve the investigation of phenomena that bourgeois social science is unconcerned with (for example, the transition from the formal to the real subsumption of labour under capital within the developing labour process of nineteenth century

capitalist production).

The second assumption that Ryerson made in believing Communist historians could simply apply the science of historical materialism to the materials offered up by bourgeois historiography concerned the nature of Marxist theory. The assumption was that Marxism was a completed set of theoretical postulates, already worked out. Thus, the facts were there, the theory was complete, all that remained was to put the two together and presto! -- a People's History of Canada.

While his perceptions of the task would change gradually over the years, he never completely overcame the legacy of holding such a simplistic view of the relationship between his own theoretical presuppositions, and the 'facts' available through the work of bourgeois historians. Ryerson was handicapped by his deep immersion in a Stalinist tradition which assigned supremacy to theory considered independently from, and even against facts. Since the purpose of 'empirical' inquiry was simply to confirm the operation of the already known laws of motion of history, as currently interpreted by Moscow, 'facts' became quite unproblematic.

In launching the Peoples' History project, Ryerson naively believed that the work -- a history of Canada to the late nineteenth century -- could be completed "over a two year period". If he identified any potential obstacles to completion of the work, it was not the need to explore topics untouched by

bourgeois social science, but the low level of theoretical development within the CPC:

our greatest problem is not the lack of workers in the field of history and political economy -- though we have all too few of them; it is the fact that our general theoretical level needs to be drastically strengthened.²⁰

Because the correct theoretical line took precedence over the 'facts', and because Stalinist theory shared the technicist assumptions of much of bourgeois social science, Ryerson could afford to be little concerned about the amount of historical investigation required to prepare a Marxist history of Canada.

Time would prove that the theoretical level of Party members was sufficiently low, that more and more the project had to be entrusted to a Party member well versed in the changing needs of the Party line -- Ryerson himself. At this initial stage of the project Ryerson had not yet appreciated the difficulties he would encounter in launching an intellectual project that required the utmost understanding of the Party line together with research conducted through the work of bourgeois social science.

Interestingly, Greg Kealey's paper on Ryerson tries to explain the inordinate period of time required to bring the People's History of Canada project to fruition: from 1947 until 1960 for the publication of The Founding of Canada, and then an additional eight years for Unequal Union. Twenty one years is a long period of time when you consider that the

project was supposed to be completed -- and this was going to be a history of Canada to World War II -- within two years. Kealey's explanation can be seen in the following:

Stanley Ryerson in 1947, perceptively, although rather schematically, identified the tasks necessary to write a Marxist history of Canada. (Here, Kealey makes note of Ryerson's article "Marxism and the Writing of Canadian History", discussed below. -BM). No doubt due partially to the pressures of the Cold War, this task was not completed until 1967 with the publication of Unequal Union....²¹

In reality, the constant delays had nothing to do with the cold war. This is evident, for example, from Ryerson's own explanation for the incompleteness of the project in the special issue of NAM entitled "Monopoly and Labor: Pages from Canada's History" (January/February 1949). In his editorial to the special issue -- published "as a token of the fact that work (was -BM) ... being done" on the project -- Ryerson wrote:

This enterprise, started two years ago under the auspices of National Affairs Monthly, has scarcely grown beyond the stage of experimentation and exploratory groping. The lag has certain lessons for us.

First, we pay for past neglect. The poverty of previous output requires that we begin almost from scratch, so far as Marxist history writing is concerned....

Second ... the quality of Marxist understanding among many of our workers in this field is inadequate to some of the tasks....

Third ... the pull of immediate practical work led to inattention to the leadership of production and research.²²

Of the problems Ryerson identifies at this stage of the project, only the first sounds a new note (we will return to this below). The other two problems, the low level of theoretical understanding

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among Party members and the demands of day-to-day activity had both been recognized in advance. Still confidently predicting the short term completion of the project (he suggested sometime that year), Ryerson was not deterred by the development of the cold war. In fact, he was spurred to greater efforts by the conviction that greater theoretical clarity would be necessary to forestall the loss of members:

We can't afford to continue with a low level of (theoretical -BM) output. The demands of the struggle ... the scope and intensity of the enemy attack ... compel us to improve this, as other aspects of our work.²³

The slowness in completing the Peoples' History project is primarily explainable by the shifting demands of the Party line. The project would still be far from completion more than a decade later when the Party was hit by the de-stalinization crisis. After the first years of the post-war period, the CRC leadership became convinced that it had succeeded in overcoming the dangers of Browderism, and that it was now able to read the signals from Moscow without worry. It thus became more difficult to persuade leading Party members to sacrifice the demands of practical political work in order to do "theoretical" research. Theoretical doubts about the "correctness" of some political line usually prompted Party leaders to pay greater attention to the official Moscow publications, rather than directing them towards greater efforts in novel theoretical work. It was the Party line,

after all, that was the guide to action, not Marxist theory.

Echoing Ryerson's complaint of 1949, that practical political work was pulling Party leaders away from attention to the People's History project, Howe and Coser have written the following concerning the people who led Communist Parties:

Priding themselves on being practical men, they attached very little prestige to intellectual work and betrayed no desire to emulate Stalin's pretensions as a political theoretician.... Fascinated as they were by the mechanics of power, the Stalinist leaders, if they read Marxist works at all, were likely to turn to those dealing with political strategy and tactics rather than those concerned with ultimate goals or values....²⁸

While this undoubtedly explains some of the difficulties in bringing the project to completion, the constantly shifting Party line was probably more important. Because the People's History of Canada was under the immediate direction of the Party leadership, it had to be based upon an updated and completely "correct" political perspective. Moreover, since Ryerson and the other CPC leaders all subscribed to the notion of partiinost, every shift in the Party line -- whether directly from Moscow, or as a result of new interpretations of the old line -- was to be reflected in both the content and the thrust of the history being written.

We have already seen how the doctrine of partiinost effected Ryerson's work on the 1837-38 rebellions. Some indication of its importance for the People's History project can be gleaned from a speech by Ryerson to the National

Committee meeting in May 1953 (published in NAM under the title "Reach the People, Build the Movement"). In it Ryerson explains that the first draft of the People's History (probably submitted to the Central Executive Committee in the summer of 1952) proved inadequate; his explanation comes in the context of a comment on the significance of Stalin's last theoretical work: Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R. Ryerson says,

while we have conducted discussions and Study of Comrade Stalin's last, great work -- we have not sufficiently worked through its application to Canadian development, in relation to our draft program and to our mass work....

Our slowness and delays in completing work on the People's History of Canada are a reflection of this weakness. While extensive and valuable work has been done by the comrades engaged on the project, publication (planned for last fall) had to be postponed, because the draft submitted fell short, theoretically and politically, of our requirements. Final completion of the work will now have to follow the federal election; but I would appeal to NC members and others as well, to contribute to the project data relating to the U.S. imperialist domination of our country -- striking and significant facts which they may encounter in working out the application of our Platform, concretely, in the constituencies.²⁴

In another context, Ryerson demonstrated the extent to which Stalin's latest pronouncement had effected his perception of the ideological and practical tasks of the CPC:

The decisions of the 19th Congress of the CPSU, and the great, new work of J.V. Stalin, Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R., signalled a turning point in the history of the world: in the new stage of advance to Communist society in the Soviet Union, in the new deepening of the general crisis of capitalism.²⁵

Ryerson's first comment strongly suggests that the original draft of the People's History of Canada was rejected because it did not stress the dangers of American imperialism sufficiently. Not only does Ryerson mention the need for more facts to bolster the argument in that quarter, but Stalin's Economic Problems ... had argued that the likelihood of war between countries within the capitalist world bloc was growing, while the danger of war between the capitalist and socialist blocs was decreasing.²⁶ (The same point can be seen in the CPC's outline for a study course on Stalin's article, prepared by Norman Freed for the National Educational Department of the Party.)²⁷ Not surprisingly, in redrafting the original text, Ryerson's work emphasised the depth of the threat from American imperialism. To illustrate the point about how the Party line constantly shaped Ryerson's historical research, a slight digression is necessary.

After the rejection of the first draft of the People's History of Canada during 1952, Ryerson set about the task of reworking the manuscript in accordance with the new needs of the Party line. The only article to actually be published as a result of his efforts was "U.S. Invasion Repulsed: 1812-1814."²⁹ In the aim of establishing a historical tradition of Canadian struggle for national independence (this, in the context of the line regarding the new threat of war within the imperialist bloc), Communists were compelled to go all the way back to the

War of 1812. The 1954 program of the LPP explained that

In the struggle to achieve independence the Canadian people were called on to oppose British colonial rule and the expansionist aims of the rising U.S. capitalists. In the War of 1812 Canadians fought against U.S. invasion and saved our country from annexation.³⁰

This helped not only to establish an anti-imperialist tradition the Communists could claim, but also the predatory and imperialist character of the United States. The explicit reference to the War of 1812 on the first page of the Party program represents a deepening nationalism when compared with the CPC's 1952 draft version of the same program. The latter said only that

From the time of the settlement of Canada four hundred years ago, our people have fought for national independence from France and Britain. Have our people struggled through these centuries only to be swallowed now by the United States of America?³¹

The 1952 program implies the only threat to Canadian national independence from American imperialism existed in the twentieth century. By 1954, that threat was being projected much further back into the early nineteenth century.

Ryerson's 1954 article about the War of 1812 attempted to prove both that the United States had imperialist designs and that Canadian opposition to American invasions had helped to create a distinctive national consciousness among English Canadians. Ryerson maintained that by 1812 the revolutionary character of the new American republic had faded

as the rising American bourgeoisie initiated "a war of imperial conquest and aggression."³²

The war, which had been thrust upon the Canadians from without, became for them, in fact, a national war. Its outcome affirmed the separate identity of Canada. In repelling one invasion attempt after another by force of arms -- in defending their families, their homes and land -- the settlers, French and English speaking alike, became in a new way conscious of themselves as Canadians.³³

At the Spring meeting of the Peoples' History group during 1954, the new article by Ryerson and the War of 1812 was on the agenda for discussion and criticism. The memo circulated prior to the meeting contained an outline of 30 sections for the Peoples' History of Canada, stretching from the physical shape of the land mass in section 1 to the struggle for Canadian independence in section 30. Of the total, Ryerson was personally responsible for thirteen -- more than a third. Of the first fifteen sections, covering the period to 1867, Ryerson had responsibility for ten, indicating the extent to which he was personally responsible -- even at this still early stage -- for the shape of the manuscript.³⁴

Ryerson was in Eastern Europe throughout most of 1955 and 1956 for health reasons. Nevertheless, some work on the Peoples' History project seems to have continued. Ryerson did not resume control over the project, however, until after the fateful events of 1956-57 and the internal Party debates sparked by the Soviet Unions' de-Stalinization drive. Ryerson's hardline pro-Moscow stance within the CPC provides a good

measure of how far he was prepared to go in combatting any criticisms of Party orthodoxy. Furthermore, it helps to account for a portion of the delay in completing the People's History project, as well as Ryerson's renewed efforts to complete the manuscript of The Founding of Canada during 1958 and 1959.

Kruschev's secret speech on Stalin and the "cult of the personality" at the 20th Party congress of the CPSU in 1956, was to prove a major turning point in the development of Stanley Ryerson's thought. For although he proved himself a pro-Moscow 'hardliner', the revelations about Stalin, the subsequent invasion of Hungary, and the protracted debates about democracy within the CPC all took their toll. During previous disputes within the party (most notably over Browderism in 1945 and then over the "CCF government" slogan in 1948),³⁵ Ryerson had always argued for more attentiveness to the Moscow line, and a more thorough understanding of Marxist-Leninist theory. Indeed, at such moments he could be counted on to urge a return to the bible -- Stalin's History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (B) -- as a method of self-clarification.

This time, however, there were to be no simple answers to the questions and problems raised. Ryerson would again urge Party members to pursue ideological clarification, but this was to be an intellectual voyage without Stalin as the

theoretical anchor. Ryerson was embarking on a trip that would lead him further and further from the Party, until his resignation in 1971.

After the 1953 death of Stalin, there followed a period of several years during which different contenders for the top position in the Soviet bureaucracy intrigued to discredit one another. It was in these circumstances that Krushev sought to undermine those Party leaders and state bureaucrats still identifying with Stalin through his secret speech to the 20th Party Congress (in the spring of 1956). In a very long and carefully documented text, Krushev detailed Stalin's crimes, giving credence to the claims of many of the Soviet regime's opponents.³⁶

The ferment that followed both in the Canadian CP and elsewhere is understandable only in the context of the rigid and monolithic orthodoxy that had prevailed within the Communist movement. Since the late 1920's Communists throughout the world had virtually deified Stalin as the person who understood the essence of "Marxism-Leninism" better than anyone else.

As Krushev's secret speech became public in the spring of 1956, many Communist party members had their previously unshakeable faith in the Soviet Union destroyed. People who had religiously followed the party line, defending the indefensible, and rejecting as slander the "anti-Soviet"

reports in the bourgeois press, now discovered that innocent people had been murdered, that there were slave camps, that anti-semitism was rampant, and that they had been deceived.³⁷ Many party members realized that charges of their left wing critics had been true. As one Canadian Communist wrote,

The real shock, as far as many of us are concerned, is the discovery that what held us together in the LPP in the past was not in the first place, the striving for socialism in Canada, but unlimited faith in the Soviet Union -- and slavish adherence to the ideological lead of the CPSU. Now for all but the most fanatical, there can never again be the unlimited faith in the Soviet party...³⁸

One of the Canadian Communists who had professed near total faith in the Soviet Party and its political line throughout 1956-57 was Stanley Ryerson.

In the aftermath of the revelations, Buck and his pro-Moscow followers in the leadership made concessions to the rising tide of dissatisfaction and curiosity by engaging in a mild self-criticism, and admitting that they had contributed to the cult around Stalin, had neglected to investigate charges of Soviet anti-semitism, and had defended some incorrect policies of the CPSU.³⁹ Rather than stemming the internal debate, these statements by the leadership of the CPC fanned the flames of discontent, and undercut Buck's efforts to sidetrack the debate.⁴⁰

All the doubts about the CPC's future relations with the CPSU were exacerbated by two other issues: complaints about Buck's behaviour as party leader, and in the fall of 1956,

the Soviet invasion of Hungary. The event which precipitated a major split within the leadership of the CPC was the resignation of six top Party leaders in Quebec, including the Provincial Secretary of the Party, Gui Caron. In a long letter printed in the Canadian Tribune (October 29, 1956), Caron explained his resignation on the grounds that the Party leadership and in particular Tim Buck, had systematically inhibited the discussion of the secret speech by lying to the membership, and attempting to restrict the discussion. With Caron's frank discussion of Buck's efforts to stifle debate (Caron had been a member of the National Executive Committee, and was therefore privy to much of the high level manoeuvring among Party leaders, of which rank and file members were unaware), the crisis in the Communist Party escalated dramatically.

As the debate progressed into the fall of 1956, many Party members advocated severing the link with the Soviet Union and/or altering the policies of the CPC.⁴¹ Included in the latter were arguments in favour of greater democratization within the party. Following the developments in Quebec, the National Executive Committee of the Party voted in support of a resolution formulated by Norman Penner, to remove Tim Buck from the position of General Secretary and replace him with a temporary three man secretariat. (The motion was later rescinded.) Then followed a series of crucial meetings of the

Party's top leadership throughout the final months of 1956, during which the pro-Moscow faction gained the upper hand over the disparate and resignation prone forces of the critics. It was during this crucial period that Ryerson returned from Eastern Europe, where he had been living for the past two years on an "illness enforced absence." 41a

Upon his return, Ryerson immediately assumed a leadership position among the ranks of the majority hardliners, leading at least one commentator to write

The majority groups were a Buck/Morris line which conceded some critical ground to the minority groups while re-asserting all the main principles of Marxism-Leninism, and a more aggressive group around Stanley Ryerson, Tom McEwen, the Saskatchewan LPP, and Camille Dionne, which sharply criticized the minority groups as revisionist and opportunist and reasserted the traditional principles of Communist activity.42

As the hardliners gained ground within the Party -- the rank and file base of the critics within the Party leadership continued to lose ground as their supporters left the Party in waves -- the debate shifted away from the revelations and onto the preferred issues of the pro-Moscow faction: the need for democratic centralism, continued identification with and support of the Soviet Union, and a commitment to fight the "revisionism" of the critics.

Typical of the hardline position adopted was that in evidence in Ryerson's February 1957 article "Getting Our Bearings: And Correcting a Dangerous 'List to Starboard'."

In it he went on record regarding Krushev's revelations about Stalin:

The disclosure of grievous errors made in the Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership has led some people to very wrong conclusions. Not only do they fail to see that the errors, however grave, are secondary compared to the achievements recorded in building and defending socialism in the face of untold difficulties.... (emphasis in original).⁴³

The suggestion that the CPC sever its link with the Soviet Union came under the greatest attack in Ryerson's article. In his view, it amounted to complete dissolution of the Party. He believed the position of the pro-Moscow majority provided

a generally sound basis for establishing a correct approach to the Soviet Union and correct relations with the CPSU: on a footing of independence and equality, mutual exchange of views and fraternal criticism and solidarity.— To go beyond this, can only lead to proposals that our party should dissociate itself from the international communist movement; and that in my opinion would be a surrender to nationalism, a desertion of the principle of working class internationalism.⁴⁴

With this argument, Ryerson prepared the ground for the major thrust in his article; the charge that by focussing on such "secondary" errors as those revealed by Krushev rather than the achievements of the Soviet Union under Stalin, dissident Party members were acting in an "anti-soviet" fashion. Ryerson writes:

Instead of recognizing that the anti-Soviet bourgeoisie are out to wring every bit of advantage they can out of the exposure of the mistakes, and therefore that Communists should be all the more careful not to facilitate the campaign of reaction -- some people

make a virtue of joining in the campaign and lending fuel to it. So bent are they, on dissociating themselves from the mistakes, that they take on (consciously or not) the tones of outright anti-Sovietism. These "friends" of the Soviet Union who busily bring grist to the mill of the Soviet Union's enemies are helping, not the Canadian working class, but the Canadian bourgeoisie....⁴⁵

So deep was his commitment to the doctrine of partiinost, that Ryerson was willing to label all those who persisted in attempting to have a genuinely free and open debate about the significance of the Khrushchev speech as anti-Soviet. In his mind, intellectual debate in which criticisms of the Soviet Union are aired violated the demand for complete adherence to the Party line, and therefore was branded as promoting anti-Sovietism.

In the very same article, Ryerson admitted that in the past he had labelled political opponents as having different "class interests":

on some occasions ... I tended to fall into a dangerous oversimplification, failing to distinguish clearly enough between mistaken views (a problem of knowledge) and the expression of antagonistic class interests (a matter of the class struggle). This error can lead to exceedingly harmful results: to give criticism an unduly harsh character; and also to resort to organizational or administrative measures as a substitute for ideological explanations and conviction. An example of the latter occurred with the 1947 events in the Quebec Party organization, for which I bore a serious share of responsibility.⁴⁶

This latter concession was quite ironic, considering that members of the opposition within the CPC criticised Ryerson precisely for attempting to stifle discussion through

intimidation, and by means of labeling people "anti-soviet." One dissident, Edna Ryerson, attacked him in print, for his efforts to suppress discussion with the persistent challenge that Party dissidents answer to the question "Are you for or against the Party?" She explained,

In my opinion such an approach questions the loyalty and motives of comrades raising criticisms and questions. It hinders freedom of discussion. It has more in common with Calvinism than Leninism. Instead of debating ideas -- yours and others that differ with your own; instead of striving to convince and separate comrades from what you consider are incorrect ideas -- this approach drives towards separating comrades from the party. It is an example of the dogmatic thinking and sectarian practice that we have had too much of.⁴⁷

In a further intervention into the Party debate, Stanley Ryerson wrote a letter to the editor of the Canadian Tribune in April, protesting the allegedly pro-minority slant of an editorial which had failed

to make clear the main point: that the question at issue (in the intra-Party debate -BM) is the continued existence and strengthening of a party of Marxism-Leninism in Canada; and that the "platform" of the minority is the elimination of such a party, by either of two methods - A. speedy self-dissolution or B. gradual self-poisoning. ... proposals for method "A" ... having evoked only the feeblest of responses; method "B" is favoured by the right wing; supporters of the Smith-Salsberg group are now putting a 5 point platform to "unite the party". The points are: 1. Change the character of the party; 2. Emphasize the "modest role" which history assigns it in the labour movement; 3. Issue a "Declaration of Independence" from any and all relationship to the Soviet Union, and prove it by: 4. Publishing an attack on Soviet policy in relation to the national question; and 5. remove Tim Buck from leadership.

In plain fact, this "platform of unity" is a platform for the gradual dissolution of the party in a poisoned swamp of anti-Soviet hostility, rejection of revolutionary working class leadership and exchanging working class solidarity for boss class nationalism. The only way to unite the party ... is by resoundingly rejecting and condemning this "line" which if it had been inspired by Ottawa directly could not more closely coincide with the interests of reaction in Canada.⁴⁸

In a reply to Ryerson's letter, Penner complained that it illustrated

one of the main questions at issue in this debate -- the attitude of intolerance, contempt, and hatred on the part of a section of the LPP leadership towards those members of the party who attempt to examine all questions critically and who put forward for discussion views other than those accepted as "official".

To them any criticism of the Soviet Union, even criticism accepted by the Soviet leadership, becomes anti-soviet.⁴⁷

When the dust had settled after the April 1957 Party convention, Buck and the other hardliners like Ryerson were still firmly in control of the Party. In the process, the CPC had lost approximately 40 per cent of its membership, declining to about 5000 members (down from about 20,000 during World War II).⁵⁰

The events of 1956-57 had an important impact on Ryerson. Not because the debate following Krushchev's secret speech immediately shook his faith in the Communist Party, the Soviet Union, or even in the fundamentals of Stalin's interpretation of Marxism. The effects of 1956 on Ryerson were indirect: it forced him into serious study of Communist

Party theory, launching him on an intellectual quest that would end more than a decade later with the adoption of a critical stance toward the Soviet Union.

At some point after returning from Eastern Europe, Ryerson resumed command over the People's History project.⁵¹ Crucial to an understanding of his frame of mind in the period after the internal debate had concluded (i.e., during the summer of 1957) is an article he wrote for the Party's journal Marxist Review entitled "Our Program and Our Study of Marxism" (August/September, 1957).⁵² In it, he displays the intellectual disorientation that the revelations of 1956 had forced upon him. Having had his intellectual anchor -- Stalin's Marxism -- somewhat discredited (I say "somewhat discredited" because most of Stalin's theoretical positions were never officially repudiated by the international Communist movement), Ryerson urged his Party toward "a strong reaffirmation ... of the fundamental truths of Marxism, and of their validity for Canada."

Such a reaffirmation is needed, for the sake of the Party itself.... Do the basic teachings of Marxism, on exploitation, class struggle, the state, the replacement of capitalism by socialism, apply to Canada? These questions are "elementary": yet they have to be pondered and thought through afresh in this time of uncertainty and widespread loss of direction. We need a re-grounding in Marxism: the last two years are a proof of it.⁵³

Ryerson then urged Party members to return to reading the Marxist classics, omitting The History of the CPSU (B) and therefore Stalin's essay "Dialectical and Historical Materialism"

from the list. Prior to 1956, Ryerson had always harped on the importance of this book to Party members, the following comment not being unrepresentative of the importance he had previously placed upon it:

I think we should propose, in order to help stiffen the Party backbone in relation to the ideological fight, that our LPP constitution include a requirement, as an obligation for membership in the Party, of consistent study of Marxism-Leninism by each and every member. In this connection, the use of the History of the CPSU ... has got to be organized and implemented.⁵⁴

In his 1957 article, Ryerson urged the Party to initiate a program of "inner party educational activity, combining study of Canada and study of the fundamentals of Marxism". This educational program

should be a vital part of the effort to rid ourselves of bureaucratic isolation and dogmatic complacency. It should give every party member a fuller confidence in the power and truth of Marxism, enabling us to defend it better against revisionist attack, and apply it correctly in new conditions.⁵⁵

In a lengthy appraisal of the Party's past theoretical difficulties, Ryerson identified several problems: a tendency to ignore the importance of theory among the Party leadership and to be satisfied with a "general" knowledge of Marxism, and an uncritical attitude towards theoretical work stemming from Moscow. He also noted the still uncompleted "People's History" of Canada project, and confessed that earlier estimates of the work required for it had been unrealistic.

To my mind, the most insidious expression of dogmatism in our work has been the deep-seated habit

of simply relying on a "general" knowledge of Marxism with which to solve problems. Our leadership has not been characterized by serious, consistent effort to deepen its own grasp of political economy, or philosophy, or other areas of theory. And study of Canada and specific Canadian problems (e.g. the Canadian parliamentary state; Anglo-US monopolies' conflict in Canada in relation to the Canadian bourgeoisie; resources' development in the post-war expansion of the economy) -- is either neglected entirely, or only undertaken sporadically....

We have not yet managed to establish theoretical production as a continuous built in feature of national leadership. The heavy -- and real -- pressure of practical work, and our very limited material resources are the reasons we give ourselves for this; but there is, a well, strong but unacknowledged carry over of the "Anglo-Saxon contempt for theory" that the founders of Marxism used to rail against....

An example of this complacent attitude is involved in the painful slowness with which the "People's History" is being completed: there was, on my part at least, a gross underestimation of the amount of painstaking research and analysis needed to produce, even in brief outline, an attempt at a Marxist interpretation of Canadian development.

Another, not unimportant element in our theoretical sluggishness has been the attitude ... of uncritical dependence on theoretical leadership by Marxists abroad and above all in the Soviet Union. The antidote to this ... is to draw from the recent jolts to our complacency a new recognition of our own responsibility to think for ourselves and even to aspire to make some contribution to international Marxist thinking.⁵⁶

These comments are extremely revealing. Ryerson equates as the Party leadership's reliance upon "a 'general' knowledge of Marxism" and its lack of interest in fundamental theoretical issues as dogmatic. At the same time as fundamental theoretical issues were left undiscussed, serious concrete analyses of Canadian conditions were largely neglected. Taken together, these charges represent a quite serious

condemnation of the theoretical efforts of the CPC. Yet Ryerson does not go to the root of the problem. Content with describing the past practices as an example of "dogmatism", he does not ask what it was about the very nature of Stalin's version of Marxism that led to a simultaneous disregard for theory and empirical analysis. Hence his solution to the problem was not to develop a critique of Stalin's distortion of Marxism, but simply to preach the need for greater self reliance. In other words, Ryerson sought to have Canadian Communists assume greater responsibility for a made in Canada political line premised largely on the same Stalinist version of Marxism that had originally led to the degradation of theory and empirical inquiry.

In his comments on the difficulties with the Peoples' History of Canada, Ryerson confessed to a weakness that had plagued the project from its inception eleven years earlier. His comments about his "gross underestimation" of what was required for even the "brief outline ... of Canadian development" envisaged, confirms the view that it was not the cold war which had delayed the project's completion.

A memo written early the next year by Ryerson suggests that he had resumed work on the manuscript of the Peoples' History of Canada to 1867 by himself. In it he explained the reasons for the project's continuing incompleti on in personal terms:

Major obstacles responsible for the work's proceeding so slowly:

- ill health which drastically limits my working capacity
- necessity of devoting about half of my time to earning a living
- intermittent demands of other work (articles, materials etc.)
- difficulties in securing assisting research and technical forces.

Of the foregoing, only the latter two are modifiable. I have therefore asked that for the remainder of this year I be given no other responsibility or assignment; if this can be held to, there is every prospect of completing the job in '58.⁵⁷

In the same February 1958 memo, Ryerson reported that all but five of twenty-three chapters in the People's History to 1867 were completed -- though some of them still required revisions. Reporting on the overall state of the project, Ryerson wrote

Revision of the draft is on the basis of well founded criticisms made of it, as to the need to bring out more clearly the main lines of development, cutting down an overburden of secondary material; and to strengthen the narrative aspect as against the analytical. A further need for some reworking arose from the development of our programmatic approach, in the last couple of years, to the relative "struggle against monopoly capital". the bearing of this problem on the approach in the History is quite marked: in some passages an element of over-emphasis on the first themes tended to distort an all-sided picture of Canadian capitalist development as a whole; and this had to be corrected without making the opposite mistake of playing down the U.S.-Canada relationship theme.⁵⁸

Ryerson was noting the need to make the People's History correspond to the Party's programmatic approach to Canadian politics as it had developed to that point in time. He unabashedly worried about how to weight two themes -- Canadian

nationalism, and the "struggle against monopoly capital" -- to insure the final product would not point its readers in the "wrong" (in terms of the Communist Party programme) direction. In the same memo, Ryerson explained that once the manuscript was reworked, and the additional chapters completed, a "critical discussion" would be organized, in which the manuscript would be checked -- presumably for any political problems.

Later that year, in a memo on "work in the field of history" submitted to the National Executive Committee of the Communist Party by the National Education Committee, Ryerson's work on the People's History project was further discussed. The memo noted the "crisis of bourgeois ideology" in the realm of historical work,

at a time when Canadian anxiety over U.S. domination is stimulating wide interest in Canada's history. This is a challenge to us, to tell the real story of Canada's development, and in so doing to indicate the road ahead.⁵⁹

The memo also discussed "the need to study a number of questions" connected with "the specific peculiarities... of the working in Canada of the general laws of social change." The unknown author of this memo illustrated the point "with some items dealt with in SR (i.e., Stanley Ryerson -BM) draft." Tracing the nineteenth century fortunes of the Canadian bourgeoisie, the memo concluded that the general line of Ryerson's draft of the People's History demonstrated "the

bourgeoise as betrayer of the national interest ... and our fight for Canadian independence, vs. U.S. domination...."⁶⁰ These were, presumably, instances of the "general laws of social change" in the Canadian context.

Another comment in this memo indicates that as of that time -- November 1958 -- the intention was still to publish the entire manuscript covering the period to 1867. Why the portion of the manuscript covering the period 1812 to confederation remained unpublished until eight years later is unknown. Whatever the reason, there is little doubt that it too was closely read by Party leaders before being published. The November 1958 memo concluded with several proposals, one of them regarding Ryerson's draft manuscript: "the NEC (National Executive Committee -- the highest leadership body in the CPC -BM) to decide on method of pre-publication handling through subcommittee or otherwise."⁶¹

In summary, The People's History Project was very carefully supervised by the leadership of the CPC, and constantly altered in the process of preparation so that it would be up to date on the latest thinking as reflected in the Party line. In short, it was a very good example of what we have been describing as the Communist pre-occupation with "partianost", the use of theory to legitimize and justify the political content of the Party line -- in this case, by projecting that Party line backwards onto the development of Canadian history.

So much for the evolution of the Peoples' History Project; the theoretical bases for the project also needs to be sketched out. For that, we return to Ryerson's article of 1947: "Marxism and the Writing of Canadian History". The reader will recall that the major purpose of this article was to "initiate a comprehensive criticism of the main trends in Canadian bourgeois historiography," as a necessary prelude to launching the actual writing of a Marxist history of Canada. In fact, there was nothing comprehensive about his division of bourgeois history into idealist and materialist approaches (invoking the sort of simplistic definitions of these concepts that had been used in A World to Win) and his perfunctory dismissal of the former. Idealist interpretations of Canadian history were said to include the works of such authors as A.R.M. Lower, Guy Fregault, F.X. Garneau, Abbe Lionel Groulx, and Donald Creighton. Ryerson furnished quotes from these historians illustrating that they interpreted historical development as "variants of the Idea, which is the prime mover of history;" -- accordingly, they were dismissed by Ryerson as part of "the dominant prevailing trend in Canadian bourgeois history-writing."⁶²

Far more important for Ryerson was the materialist approach to Canadian history. He noted the (at that time) growing importance of a materialist tradition of economic determinism as pioneered in the United States by Beard, and

in Canada by Innis. When Ryerson rejected their brand of "economic determinism" he was rejecting a conception of Marxism frequently objected to by Communists. Indeed, although he nowhere defines what he means by "economic determinism", the term had a well-established meaning, described by Tim Buck in Canada: The Communist Viewpoint:

Because Marxism places a great deal of emphasis upon economic development as the fundamental underlying factor in social change, apologists for the profit system try hard to misrepresent it as fatalistic dependence upon economic factors alone. That is completely false. Marxism emphasizes just the contrary....⁶³

Buck then proceeded to explain, following Engels, that Marxism did not posit a uni-directional determination of the economy (i.e., the economic base) over the superstructure, but rather an interaction between the two. He cites Engels' refutation of "economic determinism" to elaborate the point:

According to the materialist conception of history the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If, therefore, somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining one he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure ... also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form. There is an interaction of all these elements, in which ... the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary.⁶⁴

It was with such arguments that Engels sought to debunk the crude technological determinist interpretation of Marx's work after the latter's death. To parry the thrust of those who

developed such a view of Marxism, Engels promoted the idea that Marx believed the main factors of history -- the base and the superstructure -- mutually influence each other in their interaction. The following quote is typical:

Political, religious, juridical, philosophical, literary, artistic, etc. development is based on economic development. But all these react on one another and also upon the economic basis. It is not that the economic situation is cause, solely active, while everything else is only passive effect. There is, rather, interaction on the basis of economic necessity, which ultimately always asserts itself.⁶⁵

The problem here, is precisely that which was identified in our discussion about Stalin's reliance upon the base/superstructure model. The whole "interaction" approach presupposes that the base and superstructure are mutually discrete phenomena, while denying their dialectical unity as the products of the same objectifying human labour. The "interaction" theory is simply a more sophisticated version of the crude economic determinism that it seeks to replace, because it destroys the mediation and internal relation of the so-called "base" and the "superstructure". In other words, simply overturning the crude and mechanistic determinism of a Beard or an Innis, by adding the possibility that politics and other 'superstructural' phenomena can "act back on the economy" does nothing to locate Marx's concept of human labour at the center of the analysis. In fact, as our discussion of Stalin's theory has demonstrated, mechanical materialism

supplemented by idealism to yield the "interaction approach" to historical materialism does not alter a fundamentally technicist conception of human production.

The same interaction style approach to historical materialism applies to the Stalinist conception of the relation between the two discrete elements of the economic base -- the material technical process of production and the social relations of distribution. The latter are seen to "react back upon" the material process of production rather than simply being mechanically determined by it. It is in this context that Ryerson's criticisms become intelligible.

After citing numerous examples of Innis' staple thesis at length, Ryerson asked "What is wrong with this plausible and seemingly 'materialist' interpretation?" His response was that Innis' whole materialist approach was flawed because it ignored the existence of class relations:

Professor Innis has grasped the salient fact that the energies of successive generations of Canadians have been devoted to the production of furs, lumber, wheat etc. But he has preferred to stop at that, and conveniently "overlook" the existence and implications of social, class relationships. A wondrous and "cumulative" fixation on producing staples serves him as the "explanation" for Canada's long drawn out status as a colony. His economy of staples is that of a classless-society. In other words a fiction.... starting with the production of staples as the "key" to Canadian economic history, and ignoring class relations Innis ends up as a eulogist of monopoly.⁶⁶

Ryerson rejected what he called Innis' "mechanical materialism", not because it presupposed an impoverished view of the immediate

process of production as exclusively material, but because Innis neglected to add on the dimensions of class relations and the superstructure. Thus, from Ryerson's perspective Innis' work was not fundamentally flawed, even though it viewed man as a material factor of production -- and by no means the most important one. To implicitly suggest that Innis' theory simply required the addition of an extra 'social' dimension to render it compatible with Marx's historical materialism is to misunderstand Marx's concept of production.

Ryerson's investigation of Innis' work did not result in the sort of Marxist critique of staple theory as a form of commodity fetishism that one might expect. There is nothing in Ryerson's evaluation of Innis like the Marxist criticism recently advanced by David McNally:

Innis' work contains the fetish of market relations and the "technicist" conception of production which characterize classical political economy according to Marx. ... Innis' work ... embodied a crude materialism inherited in large part from Veblen which led to a systematic neglect of the role of social relations of production in economic life. The result was a rigidly deterministic interpretation of economic history whose central feature was commodity fetishism -- the attribution of creative powers in the historical process to the staple commodity as a natural and technical object.⁶⁷

Ryerson was incapable of generating this sort of specifically Marxist criticism of the Canadian practitioner of "mechanical materialism" in economic history, because the Stalinist tradition itself accepted the fetishized and technicist view of human production. He would return to an evaluation of Innis' writings again in the 1960s and reiterate his critique of Innis as a theorist whose work was flawed by the omission of the class dimension.

The eleven year period from 1945 to 1956 was the one in which Ryerson proved his mettle as a theorist and a practitioner of Stalin's version of Marxism. Although Ryerson wrote little of lasting theoretical value during this period, his persistent references to the importance of "Marxist-Leninist" theory and his efforts to popularize Stalin's Marxism, help to establish his adherence to a technicist version of historical materialism. It was no coincidence that Ryerson's theoretical ultra-orthodoxy happened to coincide with the most dismal period of 'theoretical work' in the history of the international movement:

In this period the clericalization of the movement reached its highest point. Stalin was deified, and the textbook The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course became the Communist's bible. The good Communist had no need to blow his mind on the works of Marx or Lenin, because Stalin had distilled the essence of Marxism, all it was really necessary to know, into this little book, written in a way that was at once 'accessible' and 'profound', to enable all men, be they scholars or 'simple men', to follow unhesitatingly the high road to Communism.⁶⁸

It is during this period, when Ryerson turned his considerable intellectual prowess to mastering Stalin's Marxism, that he developed some of the many theoretical presuppositions that he apparently never subsequently questioned. By 1956, Ryerson's theoretical work manifest every one of the major tenets of Stalinist theory.

In 1960 Ryerson finally published a portion of the Peoples' History of Canada with the book The Founding of

Canada: Beginnings to 1815. The inside back cover of the first edition told the reader that "The present work will shortly be followed by a sequel embracing the period of 1837, early industrial growth and Confederation." The book was published eight years later under the title Unequal Union: Confederation and the Roots of the Crisis in the Canadas, 1815-1873. What intervened to prevent the immediate publication of the second volume of the Peoples' History of Canada project is not apparent.

Among the acknowledgements Ryerson made in the Foreword to The Founding of Canada was the following:

In 1946 a Conference on Marxist Studies held in Toronto set up a committee to work on a People's History. Its members, and those of the History Group of the recently formed Marxist Study Centre, have worked on research and prepared valuable material.⁶⁹

In addition he cited leading figures in the CPC "for reading much of the book in proofs and making valuable criticisms and suggestions." The people he mentioned were Tim Buck, Leslie Morris, John Weir, Libby and Frank Park, Robert S. Kenny and Margaret Fairley. Though he made the conventional claim to be responsible for any "omissions, errors and shortcomings," it was quite unlikely that the carefully scrutinized manuscript would contain any political or theoretical 'deviations' from the Party line.

In the Foreword to the 1960 edition of The Founding of Canada Ryerson explained that the book was intended as a "sketch

of our first beginnings", and was just the first part of a larger study of the driving forces that have shaped this country. My hope is to break ground, to indicate possible lines of approach to a Marxist interpretation of Canadian history.⁷⁰

Our main task here is to determine whether Ryerson's understanding of Marx's materialist conception of history had been fundamentally altered in the years since his explicit acceptance of Stalin's Marxism, and to investigate whether those "driving forces" of which he spoke were Stalin's metaphysical laws of motion of history. We will begin with the explicitly methodological and theoretical sections of the book before turning to the actual employment of concepts in the text.

In the Acknowledgements to the second edition of the book, Ryerson explained that since both The Founding of Canada

and its sequel are an effort at interpretation rather than one of search into unexplored areas, I have drawn mainly on already available material At the same time, in re-evaluating the existing data one is struck by the need for a great deal of further research, particularly into the conditions and struggles of the working people.⁷¹

Coming some seventeen years after the Peoples' History of Canada project was first initiated on the premise that a Marxist history could be written from the materials at hand, this statement confirms Ryerson's 1958 admission that he had underestimated "the amount of painstaking research and analysis needed to produce ... a Marxist interpretation of Canadian

development."⁷² The recognition that bourgeois social science simply did not provide all the 'facts' required to be processed through Marxist theory had already been evident in the first edition of The Founding of Canada, when Ryerson modestly -- but properly -- described his book as an attempt "to break ground, to indicate possible lines of approach to a Marxist interpretation of Canadian history."⁷³ Nevertheless, Ryerson's observation about the need for further research would not deter him from publishing both of his volumes of the Peoples' History project, without having done any original research into "the conditions and struggles of the working people."

With the post-1956 questioning of what constituted orthodox Communist theory, and with the renewed emphasis on the need for a specifically Canadian road to socialism, Communist historical work could make greater strides in attempting a dialogue between theoretical concept and empirical detail. Yet, for those Communists remaining in the Party -- Ryerson included -- the theoretical concepts remained those initially developed by Stalin, while empirical investigation continued to be subordinated to the vagaries of the Party line. The net result was a more 'sophisticated' variety of Stalinist analysis, in which the operation of the principle of partiinost was muted somewhat by the 'liberalism' of the post-1956 period. It was that 'liberalism' which gave Ryerson

the latitude to undertake the theoretical excursion that would lead him away from the Party by the end of the 1960s.

Ryerson began where his theoretical inquiries into the character of "bourgeois history writing" had left him in the forties, with the problems posed by the interpretation of Marxism as a form of "economic determinism" (the label he had pinned on Innis):

Contrary to an oft repeated fallacy, Marxism is not "economic determinism" Marxism holds that it is the people who make history -- their labour and their struggles and their dreams. And that these are understandable and have meaning when seen in their real setting: man's progressively extending mastery over the forces of nature; and the succession of social systems that have marked, one after another, the stages of his progression.

This real setting is a universal fact of life. Man in relation to nature; man's society undergoing gradual or revolutionary change....⁷⁴

Here is the first suggestion that Ryerson had not altered his theoretical allegiance. The interpretation of Marxism he was preoccupied with dissociating himself from was still "economic determinism" rather than Stalinism. The claim that "Marxism holds that it is the people who make history" may appear to counter his previous adherence to Stalinist orthodoxy by placing human labour and struggle at the center of his analysis, but this is deceptive. The Stalinist tradition had always accommodated such views, provided it was understood that while making history, people were simply acting as the vehicles or instruments of impersonal forces greater than themselves (e.g., the spontaneous and incremental growth of the productive forces).

Decisive evidence that Ryerson was still operating with a Stalinist theoretical framework is found in a short article in a 1961 issue of Marxist Review. In "Historians Debate at Stockholm" Ryerson reported on his experiences at the Eleventh International Congress of Historical Sciences which met during the summer of 1960. His primary interest was in conveying the results of the debate between the representatives of the two world systems -- a debate which took on "the aspect of a massive collision between the world outlooks of historical idealism and historical materialism, anti-Marxism and Marxism."⁷⁵ Ryerson's discussion about a Marxist paper delivered by one E.M. Zhukov (from Moscow University) on "The Periodization of World History," and the discussion it provoked helps to clarify his position on the centrality of human labour to the materialist conception of history.

Ryerson derided those "idealist" historians who opposed "the historical-materialist conception of (history -BM) as a progressive succession of socio-economic formations, in which the class struggle is the driving force of change."⁷⁶ In the discussion which Zhukov's paper provoked Ryerson used Canadian examples to substantiate the validity and purpose of periodizing human history and "the existence of a law governed succession of social systems." Such arguments were necessary to establish "the possibility of learning from history, of gaining a sense of direction in today's world." All this is interesting for the credence it lends to the idea that Ryerson still subscribed to a rigidly orthodox stages theory of human history -- the evolution of society taking place in accordance with the pre-ordained laws of motion of history.

The real importance of this article however, rests on those comments which Ryerson chose to emphasize by citing with approval and at length. (In his short four page article on the International Congress, Ryerson devoted a page to summarizing and commenting upon Zhukov's paper.) Despite his rhetoric about the class struggle as the "driving force of history," Ryerson quoted Zhukov indicating that he still believed the "driving force" of history to be located in the productive forces (defined in the Stalinist sense). Zhukov said that

although the progressive replacement of socio-economic formations was prepared and in the long run was determined by the development of the productive forces, it was chiefly carried out by people engaged in a stubborn struggle between reaction and progress, the decaying old and the advancing new societies. (all my emphasis -BM).

The objective laws of social development do not reveal themselves mechanically. They become manifest only through the medium of concrete activity of masses of people, who are the true creators of history. The greater or lesser activity of the masses, the scope of progressive or reactionary ideas, the actual balance of forces of the old and the new, which reveal themselves in the activity of classes and parties, either stimulate or hinder the course of historical advancement. (all my emphasis -BM) 77

The passages of Zhukov's paper which Ryerson chose to cite as evidence of the strength of the historical materialist approach to history unmistakably identifies the productive forces as the real "driving force" of history, with the class struggle as merely the medium through which the activity of material reality expresses itself. Ryerson left little doubt that he still subscribed to Stalin's metaphysical view of history.

Returning to the Foreword of The Founding of Canada

Ryerson's adherence to Stalin's dualism -- as between material production and social relations -- is suggested in another passage:

Labour, production, the real relationships of living society; this is the point of departure for historical materialism, as it is for everyday life. Thought and feeling, ideas and passion and imagination have their being in a material world, are conditioned by it, work upon it. 78

This comment indicates Ryerson's continued reliance upon the dualism typical of Stalinist theory. The phenomena of consciousness are set over and against the "material world" as two discrete objects interacting on each other. The dualism is confirmed in a subsequent comment about the

consciousness of stone age people in North America being "a reflection of their material conditions of existence."⁷⁹

By employing the reflection theory of consciousness that he had used in A World to Win Ryerson was contravening Marx's view of man as the agent of human history. As we saw earlier, Marx stressed man's active role in producing his consciousness, while Lenin had made the same point with his comment that "man's consciousness not only reflects the objective world, but creates it...."⁸⁰ Human consciousness is not simply a passive product of material reality which can act back on that pre-established and given reality. Human consciousness, for both Marx and Lenin (at least in his Philosophical Notebooks), is the active product of men who simultaneously embody and create material wealth, social relations, and their own consciousness. Ryerson's dualistic and determinist formulation serves notice that in The Founding of Canada he had neither abandoned nor even begun to confront the basic premises of Stalin's Marxism.

In reviewing the evolution of the People's History project, as well as the methodological and theoretical premises underlying it, we have illustrated the fundamental continuity of Ryerson's work -- prior to the sixties -- as a part of the Stalinist tradition. Any suggestion that his 1968 book Unequal Union represents a radical departure in theoretical terms, depends critically upon an appraisal of Ryerson's

shifting theoretical views during the decade of the sixties. Accordingly, the next chapter examines some of his most critical writings from the period between the publication of The Founding of Canada and Unequal Union.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER X

1. see "The Epoch of Fulfillment of Marxism," by Tim Buck, NAM, Vol. 4, #1, 1947, p. 38.
2. see Canada: The Communist Viewpoint, by Tim Buck, Progress Books, 1948.
3. see Ryerson's "The Party and the 100th Anniversary of Marxism," in Club Life, Vol. 4, #2, 1947, p. 6.
4. Kenny Papers, University of Toronto (Fisher Library), Box 3.
5. see Kealey's "Looking Backward: Reflections on the Study of Class in Canada," in History and Social Science Teacher, Vol. 16, #4, summer 1981, p. 220.
6. ibid., p. 218.
7. see Kealey's "Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson: Canadian Revolutionary Intellectual," unpublished paper presented to the annual meetings of the Canadian Political Science Association, May 1981, p. 1.
8. ibid.
9. ibid., p. 2.
10. see "The Historians' Group of the Communist Party," by Eric Hobsbawm, in Rebels and Their Causes: Essays in Honour of A.L. Morton, ed. Maurice Cornforth, Lawrence and Wishart, 1978, p. 27; also see Neal Wood's Communism and British Intellectuals, Columbia, 1959.
11. see Hobsbawm, pp. 30-1.
12. see The American Communist Party, by Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, Praeger, 1957, p. 310.
13. ibid., pp. 31-4.
14. see John Weir's article, "Notes on the Study of Our History," NAM, Vol. 1, #4, 1944, p. 119.
15. NAM, Vol. 3, #10, 1946, p. 319.
16. NAM, Vol. 3, #11, Nov. 1946, p. 358.
17. see "The One-Hundredth Anniversary of Marxism" (Decisions of the National Executive, L.P.P.) in Club Life, Vol. 3, #10, 1946, p. 2.

18. see "Marxism and the Writing of Canadian History," by Ryerson in NAM, Vol. 4, #2, Feb. 1947, p. 47.
19. see "Marxism and the Writing of Candian History," op. cit., pp. 46, 49.
20. ibid., p. 50.
21. see Kealey, "Looking Backward...", p. 220.
22. Ryerson's editorial, in NAM, "Re-Conquest", Vol. 6, #1, pp. 3-5.
23. "Re-Conquest", op. cit., p. 4.
24. see Ryerson's "Reach the People -- Build the Movement," NAM, Vol. 10, #4, 1953, p. 39; also see Stalin's Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R., in The Essential Stalin, ed., Bruce Franklin, Anchor Books, 1972.
25. see Ryerson's "The Proud Title: Member of the Party," NAM, Vol. 10, #3, 1953, p. 15.
26. see Fernando Claudin's The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform, Penguin Books, 1975, pp. 595-596.
27. see Kenny Papers, University of Toronto (Fisher Library), Box 18, "Study Course on J.V. Stalin's Classical Work: 'Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR'," by Norman Freed.
28. see The American Communist Party, pp. 544-545.
29. see Ryerson's "U.S. Invasion Repulsed: 1812-1814," NAM Vol. 11, #5, 1954.
30. see Canadian Independence and a People's Parliament, program of the Labour Progressive Party, 1954, p. 3.
31. see Canadian Independence and People's Democracy, program adopted by the National Committee of the Labour Progressive Party, 1952, p. 5.
32. Ryerson, "U.S. Invasion...", p. 5.
33. ibid., p. 23.
34. see Kenny Papers, Unviersity of Toronto (Fisher Library), Box 19.

35. see "The Party in Action," by Ryerson in NAM, Vol. 11, #2, 1949, pp. 77, 79.; also see The Communist Party in Canada, by Ivan Avakumovic, McClelland and Stewart, 1975, pp. 177-179.
36. see the "Secret Speech of Krushchev Concerning the 'Cult of the Individual', Delivered at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, February 25, 1956, in The Anti-Stalin Campaign and International Communism: A Selection of Documents, ed. by the Russian Institute, Columbia University Press, 1956; also see Stalinism and After, by Alec Nove, George Allen and Unwin, 1975.
37. see The American Communist Party, pp. 490-491.
38. cited in Avakumovic, p. 225.
39. Canadian Tribune, May 28, 1956.
40. Avakumovic, p. 225.
41. *ibid.*
- 41a. see Ryerson's "Getting Our Bearings: And Correcting a Dangerous 'List to Starboard'," in NAM, February 1957, page 11.
42. see Kealey's "Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson...", p.8.
43. Ryerson, "Getting Our Bearings...", pp. 11-12.
44. *ibid.*
45. *ibid.*
46. *ibid.*
47. see Edna Ryerson's "Chief Danger to Party is Left Sectarianism," in NAM, April 1957.
48. see Ryerson's letter in The Canadian Tribune "Critical of our report on 'great LPP debate'," April 1, 1957, p. 5.
49. Norman Penner's criticism of Ryerson is found in his letter to The Canadian Tribune April 8, 1957, "Ryerson and LPP", p. 5.
50. see "Relations Between the Communist Parties of Canada and the USSR since 1953; as Reflected by the Communist Press in Canada," MA Thesis, by G.H. Powell, Carleton University, 1971, p. 70.

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71. ibid., p. 330.
72. see Ryerson's "Our Program....", p. 42.
73. see Ryerson's The Founding..., p. vi.
74. ibid., p. vii.
75. see Ryerson's "Historians Debate at Stockholm," in Marxist Review, #177, January/February, 1961, p. 26.
76. ibid., p. 29.
77. ibid., p. 30.
78. The Founding...
79. ibid., p. 43.
80. see Lenin's Collected Works, Vol. 38, pp. 212-3, Progress Publishers.
81. Ryerson's The Founding..., p. x.

CHAPTER XI

RYERSON'S INTELLECTUAL DRIFT DURING THE DECADE
OF THE CPC'S 'LIBERALIZATION'

The decline of the Canadian Communist Party in the period since the war undoubtedly owed a lot to the strength of anti-communist sentiment, fueled by events like Khrushchev's secret speech and the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. But in an important sense it was (and still remains) an anachronism on the Canadian political scene. As a Party committed to the parliamentary reform of capitalism it aspired to a place on the political spectrum already occupied by a larger and more successful social democratic party - the NDP. If the CPC was incapable of providing a serious social democratic alternative to the NDP, neither was it capable of a straightforward return to the style of politics prevalent before 1956; after all, "the maintenance of Stalinist discipline depends on the creation of a psychological sense of isolation". As Birchall explains:

This sense of isolation does not depend simply on repression by the ruling class ... But the sense that every zigzag, every expulsion and show trial must be swallowed depends above all on the existence of a concrete piece of territory

where capitalism has been overthrown, a living pragmatic justification for any excesses. Stalinism without a motherland is impossible. But in the period of 'peaceful co-existence' (and the period after the events of 1956 -BM) the idea of Russia as a motherland of a revolutionary combat organization can be little more than ludicrous.¹

From the early 1960s the CPC tacked away from a reliance upon the sense of isolation which had been the mainstay of its declining forces since the War. Making the effort to move closer to the mainstream of Canadian politics meant a new openness to the middle class, and a new intellectual 'liberalism'.² It was intellectuals like Ryerson who could embark on such a path at the beginning of the decade, only to find themselves alienated from the Party by the time the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia.

The decade of the 1960s was to be a decisive one in Ryerson's theoretical and political development. Following the publication of The Founding of Canada and the establishment of the Communist Party of Canada's Marxist Study Centre, Ryerson devoted much of his energy to writing for and editing the new Party journal, The Marxist Quarterly. Through its pages it is possible to document much of this theoretical and political development throughout the decade.

The first issue reported on a conference held by the French CP on the theme "Humanism and Dialectics". Ryerson,

who had attended on behalf of the CPC and the Marxist Study Center (MSC), gave some indication of his newly developing intellectual 'liberalism' in citing the conference organizer -- Roger Garaudy -- as saying that among the shoals to be avoided by Communists is the narrow

cramped conception of Marxism-Leninism simply as a position to be defended, a fortress to be held, with every portcullis closed, while one peers out over the battlements at all who are not 'our people', wandering on the distant plains.

"Another" difficulty to be avoided wrote Ryerson:

is, failure or reluctance to study the content of the work of our adversaries, satisfying oneself with affixing political labels to them.⁴

Ryerson would return to this theme of the necessity of studying the intellectual output of non-Party members throughout the decade. Nevertheless, he would prove incapable of heeding Garaudy's warning that "any retreat towards an impoverished pre-Marxist materialism would result in a disastrous failure for Communist theorists."⁵ Despite a commitment to engaging in debate with other currents of thought, Ryerson's adherence to Stalin's version of Marxism would prove almost unassailable. To illustrate this, we survey some of Ryerson's most important writings from the 1962 inception of The Marxist Quarterly, until the 1968 publication of Unequal Union.

One important article written by Ryerson was a series of observations on the 13th International Congress of Philosophy

"Problems of Man, Critique of Our Epoch: Philosophy in Today's World" (The Marxist Quarterly, 1963). In this piece, Ryerson exhibited a level of tolerance toward non-Communist philosophies that would have been unthinkable before 1956. He favourably reported that

in their participation, Marxist philosophers gave evidence of that striving for a greater openness and creativity, for the searching of common ground with other democrats and humanists, workers for peace and human progress, which is part of the process of renewal and broadening of the influence of Marxism itself. 6

However, Ryerson's commitment to the "renewal" of Marxism had -- at this early point in the decade -- rather narrow limits. Thus, he had no difficulty distinguishing the "varieties of reactionary mysticism, supernaturalism (and) subjectivist idealism" in the presentations of some participants from the "scientific-materialist, democratic, socially progressive approaches to reality" of others. Placing his own work in the latter category, Ryerson took great comfort in suggesting that the "extraordinarily swift and many directioned growth of natural science" was a force that would stimulate criticism of capitalism. Putting an "atomic age" face on the old idea that the growth of the productive forces would lead gradually and inevitably to socialism, Ryerson wrote:

The interaction between man's conquests of nature and his understanding (and re-making) of his society and himself has entered upon a wholly new phase. (And citing one of the

conference participants, Ryerson added -BM)...
The atomic era is unthinkable without social transformation.⁷

On a similar note, Ryerson defended the use of the concept "progressive" from an attack by an American Philosopher, claiming that

Reality, in the form of immense tidal movements of social change, is asserting the value and validity of the concept of progress -- in the teeth of frenetic opposition on the part of reaction.⁸

In addition to defending the notion of progress (a cornerstone of Stalin's gradualist and evolutionary theory), Ryerson's attention was caught by a Congress debate on dialectics:

Man's growing conquest of nature poses problems.... It is understandable that the conception of dialectics in nature as well as in society, should be ever more widely debated. At a joint meeting of Soviet and American philosophers --- one of the questions raised was that of dialectics as related to the world of nature. An American professor conceded that the idea of unity and conflict of opposites, of movement through contradiction, was perhaps valid for social processes -- "But how can you extend the idea of argument, conflict, struggle, to say, the stars?!" (This same question has been raised by the Existentialists, Sartre in particular.)⁹

Ryerson dealt with this heretical idea that dialectics might not be applicable to nature firmly (though without hostility), citing the work of three natural scientists as evidence of the applicability of dialectics to natural phenomena. Evidently, he had not overcome the philosophical views expressed in A World to Win, despite a greater willingness to debate non-Party intellectuals.

In another article, "Notes on Freedom and Social Structure" (The Marxist Quarterly Summer 1963), Ryerson discussed the problems associated with the transition from capitalism to socialism. The following quote illustrates his continued use of the base/superstructure model, and sets the stage for a reformulation of the relation between base and superstructure. (Note that the content of the concepts 'base' and 'superstructure' is identical to that ascribed to them by Stalin and Ryerson before 1956.)

The socialist revolution ... replac(es) the property relations to big business society, with community ownership of the economy, it brings into being a new basis, a new social structure, whose very existence alters the terms on which the problem of freedom is posed. And this in two main respects:

1. Collective ownership of the productive plant and conscious planned direction of the economy give effect to the material conditions of freedom ... (something -BM) that the productive capacity developed under capitalism has made materially possible, but whose attainment is obstructed by capitalist property relations.

2. Collective ownership provides a wholly new, built-in democratic basis of organization of society: in place of the government of the associated producers. The conditions are thereby created for a real social equality, founded on cooperation, and for the harmonious resolving of the relationships between the collective and the individual.¹⁰

Ryerson continued to identify socialism with the elimination of the form of private property, and said nothing about workers' control of production in the labour process and workers' control of the state apparatus. Ryerson's "self government of the

associated producers" was to be achieved through a

democratic and peaceful transition to socialism, effected within the framework of the parliamentary institutions, infusing into these a new content of working-people's rule¹¹

The election of the CPC, followed by the gradual extension of the public sector under the control of the parliamentary representative of the Canadian people, would be tantamount to socialism. However, the events of 1956 had complicated even this placid and non-revolutionary vision of the transition.

In the past, Canadian Marxists -- the present writer included -- often tended to grossly oversimplify what was involved (in the transition from capitalism to socialism -BM). One element (not the only one) in our error was to take too largely for granted that fundamental change in the base (the relations of production) necessarily brought with it a solution of problems in the superstructure (political, juridical, ideological, etc.). Since Stalin, that mistake is not made so readily; but there are still implications of our understanding of the relative autonomy of aspects of the superstructure that have yet to be worked through.¹²

The reference to Stalin is a twofold one: first, the "socialist" transition of property relations in the USSR had not eliminated the possibility of a Superstructural problem like the "cult of personality" around Stalin. Krushchev's secret speech about Stalin's crimes undercut the simple determinism of base over superstructure which was so central to technicist theory. But Stalin had also made a direct theoretical 'contribution' to the refutation of the simple determinism of base over superstructure. His Marxism and Linguistics broke with the established Marxist orthodoxy of the Second International by removing language from the sphere of the superstructure and making it autonomous of (i.e., no longer determined by) the base (see the discussion of Stalin's Marxism and Linguistics above, pages 140-144).

Instead of the simple instrumentalist theory of the state and other superstructural phenomena (wherein superstructural phenomena are understood as mere instruments of the ruling class), we now see the emergence of a view in which some 'non-base' phenomena are completely autonomous (e.g., language), while others remain wholly determined by the base (e.g., politics). Besides following Stalin into a theoretical view that removes some phenomena from the realm of class society, this position encouraged Ryerson to eventually conclude that national existence (i.e., the reality of the nation) was a completely autonomous aspect of the superstructure. Hence, we find Ryerson developing the view that the national oppression of the Québécois would not be solved by a mere socialist transformation of property relations -- a position he defended publicly beginning in 1968.

In this new view, superstructural phenomena would be transformed in accordance with the objective circumstances during the transition to socialism, rather than automatically coinciding with the socialist transformation of the economic base. Ryerson explains:

The Communist Program, The Road to Socialism in Canada, envisages the society of the future as possessing a vastly freer and more democratic social and political structure (where social structure refers to property relations -- BM) than our present one. The change in the basis, in the relations of production, from capitalist to socialist, as a result of the conquest of political power by the working class, is the necessary condition for this radical enlargement of freedom. The terms of the enlargement will depend, of course, on the conditions of struggle at the time.¹³

A 'socialist' transformation of property relations was now a necessary but not sufficient condition for a 'socialist' transformation of politics, ideology, relations between national groups and so on. This new understanding of the base/superstructure model was one of the few genuine theoretical innovations Ryerson made during the decade. Its importance cannot be underestimated, since it provided the basis for an eventual re-evaluation of the national question in Quebec, and the theoretical foundation for an increasingly critical view of developments in the Eastern bloc. (Indeed, it is difficult from his writings to determine whether the theoretical innovation was fueled by observation of the rise of the nationalist movement in Quebec and the swing away from liberalism in the Soviet Union after Krushchev, or vice versa.) In any event, if the connection between developments in the base and superstructural changes could no longer be seen as automatic, then the stage was set for a division between those Communists content with a mere transformation of property relations, and those who insist that 'socialism' must also guarantee certain superstructural conditions -- specifically political liberty. Internationally, the Communist movement throughout the sixties was moving toward a split between hardline pro-Moscow elements and a trend that came to be labelled "Eurocommunism". Ryerson was following the same path tread by the Eurocommunists, in a

Party that elected to remain wedded to Moscow. This is further discussed below.

Under the pressure of the growing nationalist movement in Quebec, and armed with a realization that the transition from one mode of production to another was only a necessary rather than a sufficient condition for the transformation of superstructural phenomena, Ryerson revised his decades old assessment of the national question in relation to Quebec. In an article entitled "1973-1963: In the Beginning was the Conquest", Ryerson sought to critically re-examine what he called the "mythology of the Bonne Entente, of the amicable agreement between the two national communities", French and English.

While it is true, and a matter of major significance, that bourgeois democracy ... was secured by the British North American colonies, and then too, colonial self government (1847-67) -- and both involved the solidarity and joint efforts of French and English Canadians -- the problem of national inequality was left unsolved. This inequality was not only social and economic, but political. (And in a footnote Ryerson adds -BM) The chapters in my French Canada: A Study in Canadian Democracy (1943) on 1837-48 and 1867 ... while presenting the evolving class relationships and the role of joint popular movements of struggle in the Canadas, in terms which I believe are still generally valid, nonetheless overstate, in a few places, the magnitude of the victories secured in those struggles.¹⁴

To rectify the continuing national inequality would require the creation of "a vast popular national democratic movement in Quebec, supported by all the democratic forces in English Canada".¹⁵ And overcoming the national inequality of Quebec

was vital in the struggle for peace and the protection of Canadian independence from the US.

The new conception of the base/superstructure model was also used to analyze the difficulties of the democratization of the "socialist" countries in Ryerson's 1965 book The Open Society. It had been preceded by a 1963 article entitled "The Communists and Democracy: The Problem of Individual Freedom in the Present Ideological Struggle" published in the international Communist publication World Marxist Review (June 1963). Ryerson began by stating that for Communists in North America the problem of

changing the social consciousness of the mass of people is, together with the supreme issue of peace, the most pressing ideological preoccupation.¹⁶

Explaining that "the repetition of slogans or formulas" was an insufficient basis for changing consciousness, Ryerson suggested that

To expose the underlying realities of the "free world" requires a fuller, deeper analysis of capitalist realities than we have yet given; it requires a much more effective debate with the various ideological spokesmen and defenders of state monopoly capital; and this means becoming acquainted with their positions, their argumentation, to a greater extent than we have done so far. Finally, this task requires of us that we not only pursue the "battle of ideas" on the level of theory -- philosophy and sociology, political science and economics, ethics and aesthetics, natural science and history -- but that we distill the essence of the opposing conceptions into simple, accessible ideas,

conducting popular mass propaganda for our viewpoint in an effective way, linked closely with our day to day activities.¹⁷

With this, Ryerson had described the project which became his book The Open Society. Intended primarily as a refutation of some leading ideas of bourgeois ideology, The Open Society also exhibited a concern about the problems with the democratization process in the Eastern bloc which was not evident in Ryerson's writings in 1963. In "The Communists and Democracy ..." Ryerson still equated socialism with the "collective ownership of the means of production", since public ownership "creates the conditions for the real freedom of man".¹⁸ Moreover, Ryerson still had complete faith in the path of socialist development in the Eastern bloc.¹⁹ For that reason, the obsession with the nature of the transition from capitalism to socialism found later in The Open Society takes a somewhat different form in this article. Reflecting the earlier discussion of the base/superstructure model, Ryerson wrote:

the moment we begin to consider the super-structure ... the issue (of freedom -BM) becomes more complicated. It is here that the complex problem arises of ... what elements of political democracy have to be kept ... when passing from ... capitalism to socialism²⁰

Having posed the problem, Ryerson then attempted an answer. He contrasted bourgeois and socialist democracy: the former being "the minority rule of monopoly capital, masked by 'democratic institutions'," while the latter was "the majority rule of the

working people in power." 21 The struggle for socialism committed the Communist Party to a defence

of the democratic institutions of the country -- universal suffrage, the electoral principle, parliamentary representation, a federal state structure and free association of the nations, French and English-Canadian -- and to their broadening, extension, enrichment through further democratization.... Thus the point for us ... is not just to attack bourgeois democracy, but to identify ourselves with that which is positive and valuable in it in the course of combatting monopoly-capitalist rule. To focus only on the sham and illusory nature, the negative "formal" character of bourgeois democracy, seem to us to run counter to the essential line of the world Communist movement, as expressed in the ... decisions of the Twentieth and Twenty-Second Congresses of the CPSU and the Program of our own Party. For if democracy in our country is only "formal", and devoid of any real content, how can we visualize the possibility of a peaceful, democratic transformation of parliamentary institutions into instruments of working people's power?

Surely, the very conditions of the present struggle for peaceful co-existence make imperative a more realistic, flexible, non-dogmatic approach to the question of democracy than that which has tended to characterize our work hitherto. 22

In 1965 Ryerson published his fifth book, The Open Society: Paradox and Challenge. Getting his impetus from Popper's attack on Marxism (The Open Society and its Enemies), he attempted to debunk the claim that capitalism was an open society of freedom in comparison with the closed society of socialism.

Ryerson began by discussing freedom in the context of two themes, material production and society. As in the past, he did not question the dualism he had inherited from the Stalinist theoretical tradition:

Involved in what we call freedom are two main relationships: man in the world of nature; and people in society. Our history on this planet is one of change and achievement in each of these areas.²³

For him, man's relationship to nature was one of "growing openness and freedom". But because the "arrangement of society lags dangerously behind our knowledge of surrounding nature", man faced such threats as the H bomb and automation. In other words, the "productive forces" (in this book Ryerson talks about "technique, the tools of labour, (and) the organization of work") were conflicting with the existing network of property relations, "the fundamental framework of our society".²⁴

Today we are on the threshold of a new industrial revolution: automation, cybernetics and nuclear energy are about to revolutionize production of a vastly bigger scale and with increasing acceleration. This impending upheaval ... will pose in the sharpest terms the problem of the compatibility of the existing private enterprise and profit system with the new productive power lying within society's reach.²⁵

Ryerson's argument was quite clear: the development of the technical process of production had reached the point where a second industrial revolution was occurring, and that pointed to the downfall of private ownership of the means of production.

Ryerson formulated the point like this:

Private enterprise capitalism provides too narrow, too confining a framework for a full deployment of the productive potential of automation. The new technology ... proclaims the necessity of a rational organization -- a social organization -- of productive labour (Thus -BM) the root contradiction of capitalism ... confronts us in the form of the irreconcilable contradiction between planned, cooperative production carried on within the confines of the individual plant or firm, and the planless confusion, the egoistic and ruthless contention that rages "outside", on the market. 26

Thus, the fundamental contradiction of capitalism is that between the rational organization of the material technical labour process (Ryerson ignores, as always, the domination of machinery over man within the capitalist labour process), and the irrationality of the social relations of distribution under capitalism, as manifest in the anarchy of the market. Ryerson's only concern was to eliminate private ownership of the means of production and the anarchy of the market, while retaining the domination characteristic of the capitalist labour process. Indeed, his ambition was to organize society with the same capitalist "rationality" he sees inherent in the capitalist process of production. It takes little imagination to see the source of Ryerson's model of society run like a huge capitalist factory -- in accordance with a technical plan formulated from above, as against the working class.

Ryerson's discussion of the problems of Soviet democratization in The Open Society was shaped by the downfall

of Krushchev as leader of the CPSU in the Fall of 1964. Several months after the event he wrote an article entitled "Parliaments, Personalities and Powers", in an attempt to grapple with "the problem of leadership succession" under socialism. He made it plain that he considered "the achievement of a fully developed socialist democracy" to be a process not yet completed in the USSR -- "the change in the Soviet leadership and the manner of Nikita Krushchev's removal" being a reflection of that.²⁷ Even though all the formal procedures had been followed in replacing Krushchev, Ryerson maintained that:

Certain aspects of the operation, of the style of its handling, were such as to cause concern and evoke criticism from even close friends of the Soviet Union. One aspect that evoked understandable critical comment was the secrecy in which the proceeding was enshrouded, and the sudden and total erasure of all trace of the man who only the day before had been one of the world's leading statesmen: even his name being expunged from the public prints, the very target of the condemnation remaining wrapped in anonymity.²⁸

Yet despite his feelings of uneasiness about the affair, Ryerson nevertheless saw a golden thread in the event. At least Krushchev -- unlike Stalin -- had been removed from the leadership when he had become "unmanageable and an obstacle to ... advance".²⁹ Ryerson expressed the opinion that:

The democratization of socialist society is an inevitable component in its advance to maturity. The overcoming of the evils of the Stalin regime is an historic expression of the democratic thrust of socialist construction in the material-economic, cultural and political spheres. That it involves a process of struggle, of people, individuals tend to become their embodiment. The unnatural political perversions of the Stalin era are being coped with³⁰

But Ryerson did not leave it at that; he returned to his objection to the manner in which the removal of Krushchev had been carried out. The absence of an "open debate" on such "public policy issues" concerned him:

The practice of making public only the version and argument of the majority can hardly be conducive to the fullest development of debate ... Surely the socialist world system, which has engendered a degree of mass participation in public affairs, in community management, in the operation of the economy, that is without parallel or precedent, can find the way to resolving the problems of public debate of alternative policies in a way that transcends the bounds of inner party processing of disputed questions. This, surely, is the direction of socialist democratization, of unleashing ever greater potential creative energies, that the 20th Congress embarked upon and of which the past decade of socialist achievement has given compelling evidence. ³¹

In this passage Ryerson displays a measure of naivete about the degree of "community management in the operation of the economy", while nonetheless indicating the depth of his concern about the process of "socialist democratization". The latter concern would lead him to be one of the CPC's greatest supporters

of the reform faction within the leadership of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party, and one of the greatest opponents of the subsequent Soviet invasion.

In The Open Society Ryerson admitted the continued existence of "problems of democratization" in the USSR (a thinly veiled reference to the downfall of the 'liberal, Krushev at the hands of Brezhnev), but attributed them to international tensions, and a hangover from the Stalin era. He was still prepared to rationalize Stalinism as simply an "aberration" caused by Russia's backwardness and its international isolation. As such, it was the product "not of the nature of socialism but of impediments in the way of its achievement".³² However, Ryerson's new understanding of the relation between the base and the superstructure permitted him to explore some of the problems he believed inherent in any revolutionary transformation of society. Any struggle for socialism, including that which occurred in Russia,

involves to a tremendous degree the power of organization, the initiatives of leadership. How these can be got to operate as instruments of the general will, in an intense conflict with the entrenched resistance of the old ruling classes, without either organizations or leaders arrogating to themselves excessive power and thus imperiling democracy, is the "challenge from within". In the past, it was not faced up to.

Involved in this was not only a large political "blind spot", but a theoretical error. For a long time not a few adherents of Marxism (I among them) believed that "changing the system" was all that was needed

to ensure that democracy would flourish. Because of the fact that ... social being determines social consciousness, we assumed that the very act of revolutionizing the mode of production and establishing social ownership would "of itself", automatically, so to speak, revolutionize people's attitudes and conduct.

We thus distorted a profound truth, by oversimplification. The experience of the socialist countries has shown that one cannot "take for granted" an automatic transformation of consciousness as resulting from the creation of a new economic "base". Changing the "superstructure" made up of social and political institutions, attitudes and views, turns out to be a much more complicated process than some of us had thought....³³

Almost ten years after the revelations of 1956, Ryerson was having theoretical difficulties in theorizing the lessons of the Soviet experience in terms of the base/superstructure model of Marxism. The Stalinist perversion of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" into a "personal despotism" still posed a "need for deeply critical study and a striving for 'new beginnings,' in the theoretical and practical resolution of the problem" of the transition.³⁴ As yet, however, Ryerson was incapable of specifying what "changing the 'superstructure'" might entail, after overturning the existing property relations.

In The Open Society Ryerson also demonstrated a deepened appreciation of the way Stalinism had shaped Communist theory. Previously he had spoken in rather vague terms about the dangers of "dogmatism". The replacement of Khrushchev seems to have sparked a new concern about democracy within the Communist

movement. Ryerson wrote:

To carry through the revolutionary reconstruction of society is impossible without leadership. Yet the arrogating by a person or an organization of powers and prerogatives that go beyond the bounds set by the real requirements of the collective effort leads to a "cult", to encroachment on liberty. The theoretic^a counterpart of such a process is the turning of social science into a dogma. Democratic discussion is thereby nullified, since every difference of opinion is automatically polarized into absolute truth or absolute heresy; and science is as much the victim of the process as is democracy. Dogma and bureaucratization go hand in hand.³⁵

This statement demonstrates how far Ryerson had drifted the mid-1960s from the days of uncritically accepting all theoretical pronouncements from above. Ryerson was becoming a defender of "democracy" both within the Party and within the "socialist" state. This new pre-occupation with democracy -- a reflection of his developing commitment to intellectual dialogue -- was still impaired by the belief that 'socialism' equalled a change in the forms of property ownership regardless of the character of political and other relations. In the following, democracy is viewed as no more than a potential additional feature of socialism:

In socialist society, the priorities that prevail are those that the community interest calls for.... concern for people, for the common good, asserts itself in place of the irresponsible profiteering egoism that pervades business dominated society. Certainly, there are immense difficulties in implementing control by the working people of the economy and the state, in overcoming bureaucratic methods and

abuses of power ... especially under the material handicaps which beset the countries where socialism was first introduced. But the main thing is the fundamental historic change: from private to public ownership of the productive plant....³⁶

Socialism continues to be identified with public ownership of the material factors of production, and the establishment of a "planned" economy. Ryerson never stops to consider that socialism might have something to do with the matter of who does the planning, and whether the plan is implemented over and against the self-expressed interests of the working class. His major concern was to insure that the form of property relations conformed to the rationality inherent in the nature of the material-technical process of production (i.e. in his terms, the "productive forces"). That necessitated vesting ownership and control of the productive process of an entire nation-state within the hands of a centralized exploiter -- the state bureaucracy. At no time does Ryerson ever discuss workers' power over the state, or workers' control within the labour process.

In any event, Ryerson was now convinced that the Russian experience of the transition from capitalism to socialism was an inadequate basis upon which to develop strategies for Communists in the West.

For Marxists in the countries of advanced capitalism, the problem of projecting a democratic path to a socialist democracy is

not going to be solved successfully if the horizon of their thought is limited to contemplation of what goes on in the existing socialist states. There is no existing "model" of an advanced capitalist society making the transition to socialism.³⁷

In downplaying the significance of the Soviet road to socialism for Canadian Communists, Ryerson was unwittingly preparing the ground for his eventual rejection of the CPC as the best vehicle to achieve socialism within Canada.

In his treatment of the strategy for achieving socialism in Canada, Ryerson still subscribed to an instrumentalist view of the capitalist state as "an instrument of coercive class rule".³⁸ On the other hand, he believed that the "revolutionary reconstruction of our economic and political institutions" had to be accomplished in a manner that would "preserve and extend, and not imperil or extinguish, democratic freedoms".³⁹

Ryerson resolved these apparently contradictory views of the state by arguing that:

The bourgeois democratic state, unlike the feudal or the slaveholder's state, is not only an apparatus of coercion. It is also (and in this lies its historical originality) a means of forming and registering a certain consensus of opinion. The repressive machine is still its core; but it is not the entirety of the state. The possibility of discussing, weighing and expressing preferences in relation to alternative choices of men and policies ... leads to the counterposing of a progressive as against a reactionary course

of policy Bourgeois democracy ... holds within itself the potential for fundamental change. It is possible for labour and allied democratic forces to win a firm majority consensus in favour of public ownership and genuinely planned operation of the economy; and to fashion a majority coalition as the political instrument of such a change; and win power in an election.⁴⁰

The same theoretical argument which enabled Ryerson to interpret the capitalist state as an instrument of the ruling class allowed him to envisage the same state as an instrument of the proletariat (read 'the Party'). His criticism of the existing state did not extend to the existence of a state form per se. In fact, Ryerson maintained that the "possibility of a socialist transformation that would maintain and extend democratic rights and institutions"⁴¹ within Canada was inherent in the democratic nature of parliament, and the growing state intervention into social and economic life.⁴²

Ryerson's defence of the parliamentary road to socialism was total. After a parliamentary victory, the "radical government" Ryerson advocated would deal with the threat of a right wing counter revolution "legally" and "constitutionally".⁴³ This perspective, claimed Ryerson, could be traced to the Comintern policies of 1935:

In his report ... at the 7th Comintern Congress, 1935, George Dimitrov outlined the prospect of an advance to socialism through the defence and broadening of democratic institutions, the defeat of ultra-Right reaction, the formation of a labour and people's government. The same.

concept was put forward in programmatic form in the early 1950s by the Communists in several western countries ... Britain, Italy, Canada, among others....⁴⁴

Ryerson's Canadian solution for the difficulties of the transition from capitalism to socialism lie in combining the nationalization of the means of production with the "basic democratic liberties"⁴⁵ provided by bourgeois parliamentary democracy.

Two years after admitting that political "national inequality" remained a problem in Quebec, Ryerson reviewed several recent publications on Quebec for The Marxist Quarterly (Autumn 1965). In his article ("Questions in Dispute"), Ryerson reformulated his view of what a nation was, in light of his recent writings on the base/superstructure question:

Fundamental, for Marxists, is the primacy of the role of the socio-economic formation, the mode of production. The ethnic or national community evolves, derives its dynamic of change, in ways and directions, determined by the movement and conflict of social class forces. Not the nation but the class is primary.... But from the primacy of social structure it does not at all follow that the nation is merely a matter of form, void of a content of its own: this sort of denial of the autonomy and substance of the ethnic community is one of the impediments that have been placed by mechanical materialism in the roadway of development of revolutionary Marxism. (Has this been entirely foreign to our own difficulties and slowness in coming to grips with the issue of national self-determination?)⁴⁶

In other words, though nationality was the product of class society, it was accorded an independent reality, akin to that which Stalin had attributed to language. Herein lie the seeds of Ryerson's growing dissatisfaction with the CPC's analysis of the situation in Quebec.

His new conception of the base/superstructure model had been developed in tandem with the two most important innovations in his political views during the decade of the 1960s: the criticism of the course of democratization in the Eastern bloc, and the national question in Quebec. Yet Ryerson's adoption of the idea that some social phenomena had to be located outside the domain of either the base or the superstructure did not force him to rethink the base/superstructure distinction in any fundamental sense; an adherence to the Stalinist conception of historical materialism was never questioned. Thus, Ryerson would still straightforwardly equate the socialist mode of production the "public ownership of industry"⁴⁷ (i.e. with a new form of property relations), while insisting that the process of socialist democratization was proceeding:

Does socialization of ownership of the means of production open the way to the unfolding, on an unprecedented scale, of the potentialities of the human individual? Brewster Kneen ... alludes to what he describes as a "constant denigration of the individual" on the part of Communists in power, and to a consequent "stagnation" of the socialist society. The reality, in our opinion, refutes such assertions. That the Cold-War/Stalin-Era complex of

conditions had dire negative effects, is certain; and it is possible to mistake these for essential features of the society. But a mistake it is. Not only does Communist theory project the aim of liberation of the individual; but the actuality of countries laying the foundations of a Communist society is marked, above all else, by a participation in social and economic life that is unimaginable in our "free world".... Under socialism, "ordinary" working people are coming into their own, becoming part of the first time in history of the conscious direction of social life.⁴⁸

As the Communist Party prepared for its 19th convention during 1966, Ryerson complained about the need for more theory. The growing rift between Russia and China was "a situation which lends special urgency to the need to master the fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist theory".⁴⁹ Ryerson feared that "the heart breaking division in the world Communist movement" might encourage some Party members to retreat into "dogmatic complacency". This, at a time when Ryerson was urging the Party to intervene more actively in the intellectual mainstream by:

getting more actively into the debates that are going on. We have still to overcome a certain isolation from ... some of the main currents of intellectual life, in which social criticism is an increasingly notable ingredient.⁵⁰

As the pace of the disintegration of the Soviet monolith quickened throughout the decade, so did Ryerson's demands for greater theoretical efforts. Having opened up to the possibility of intellectual dialogue with people outside the Party, and

having acknowledged the importance of empirical research, Ryerson's need for explanations of developments in Quebec and the Soviet Union exceeded the shoddy theoretical efforts of his Party and the Soviet ideologues.

Ryerson called for more public education and propaganda by the Party, coupled with greater Communist participation in forums outside the Party. In fact, he suggested that Communists take a leading role in creating non-Party forums in which Communist ideas might get a hearing. But if the CPC was to make the adjustment to more effective propaganda, it would also require the development of more Party intellectuals and a higher quality of written work. To that end, Ryerson explained that:

To revitalize our educational work we need to create the kind of climate that encourages interest in ideas, the opening up of questions, a readiness to examine new phenomena: understanding that breadth of approach does not mean surrender of principle, but rather is a condition of its fulfillment in a rapidly changing world. Firmness of adherence to Marxism-Leninism has nothing in common with the immobilism of a closed mind.⁵¹

Ryerson stressed the need for Communists to build on the "small beginnings" that had been made in "assuring a Marxist presence in gatherings of public and academic opinion makers, scholars, researchers". He stressed the need to publish more, and higher quality Party literature, and to create in and around the Party "the kind of climate that encourages interest in

ideas" and "a readiness to examine new phenomena".

This whole field of ideological work, if we are to cultivate it on the scale that the public debate and growing interest in Marxism necessitate, requires a strengthening of systematic research and production activity, in the direction indicated in the work of the Marxist Quarterly and Study Center....

In particular, Ryerson admonished Party members to

Overcome the tendency to involve general formulas as a substitute for concrete analysis of real conditions: facile appeals to the scientific character of our doctrine do not exempt us from the hard work of really using science to explore reality and find answers to our problems. 52

Since 1957, Ryerson had stressed the need for Communist theoretical work to pay greater attention to empirical research. However, Ryerson himself had spent much of his time discussing broad theoretical and philosophical questions rather than doing empirical research. Unfortunately, the emphasis he placed on "really using science to explore reality" was not matched by a similar concern to re-examine the "scientific character" of the communist "doctrine". Nevertheless, his new found fascination with "the struggle for ideas", together with his revised analysis of the importance of the national question in Quebec, and his growing questions about the progress of democratization in the "socialist" countries, had set him on a collision course with the Party. Since 1956 Ryerson had drifted away from a dogmatic and uncritical acceptance of everything that bore the Moscow

stamp. Though he had been a hardliner and a defender of the faith in 1956, the cornerstone of the Stalinist edifice had been removed by Krushev's revelations. Without that stone, Ryerson was left to reconstruct a portion of his own theoretical framework. His growing political doubts about the Communist line on Quebec and developments in the Soviet bloc led him to a hasty and superficial alteration of Stalin's Marxism rather than a fundamental critique.

Despite some superficial theoretical shifts during the 1960s, there is no evidence that Ryerson undertook a substantive critique of his previous views on the materialist conception of history. The major changes in Ryerson's intellectual outlook pertain to a new recognition of the need to do empirical research, a commitment to intellectual debate with theorists outside the Communist movement, and a re-evaluation of the base/superstructure model.

In the above discussion we demonstrated how the base/superstructure came in for close scrutiny, and was altered to permit such phenomena as language (and later the nation) to be removed from the previously all inclusive spheres of the base and the superstructure. Having undermined the simple base/superstructure dichotomy also permitted Ryerson to have increasing doubts about the inevitability of socialist democratization, because of the supposed elimination of capitalist property relations in the Eastern bloc. In addition,

the intellectual exchange with non-Communist Party theorists encouraged Ryerson to place a new emphasis on the role of human agency in history (this was also connected with Soviet concerns about the role of "the individual in history", prevalent since 1956). But, as the discussion in the next Chapter (that dealing with Unequal Union) will show, he did so in a way which eclectically grafted his new insight onto the old Stalinist conception of production that he had operated with previously. The net effect was a self-contradictory theory which superficially placed human agency at the centre of analysis, while retaining all the features of Stalin's technicist conception of production. Only after examining Unequal Union will we turn to discuss how the issues of Quebec, socialist democratization, and openness to new ideas led Ryerson to part ways with the organizational embodiment of Stalin's Marxism.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER XI

1. See Ian Birchall's Workers Against the Monolith: The Communist Parties since 1943, Pluto Press, 1974, pp 213-214
2. See Ivan Avakumovic's The Communist Party in Canada, McLelland & Stewart, 1975, Chapter 9.
3. See Ryerson's "In France: 'The Week of Marxist Thought'", in The Marxist Quarterly, #1, Spring 1962, pp 93-94
4. ibid
5. ibid
6. see Ryerson's "Problem of Man, Critique of Our Epoch: Philosophy in Today's World", in The Marxist Quarterly, #6, Summer 1963, page 17.
7. ibid, page 6
8. ibid, page 16
9. ibid, pp 7-8
10. "Notes on Freedom and Social Structure", The Marxist Quarterly, #6, Summer 1963, page 31.
11. ibid page 33
12. ibid, page 32
13. ibid.
14. "1763-1963: In the Beginning was the Conquest", SR, The Marxist Quarterly, #7 1963, page 13
15. ibid, page 20
16. see Ryerson's "The Communists and Democracy: The Problem of Individual Freedom in the Present Ideological Struggle", in World Marxist Review, Volume 6, #6, June 1963, page 57.
17. ibid.
18. ibid page 58
19. ibid page 57
20. ibid page 58

21. ibid.
22. ibid pp 58-59
23. see Ryerson's The Open Society: Paradox and Challenge.
International Publishers, 1965, page 12.
24. ibid, pp 13 and 58
25. ibid, page 67
26. idib, page 69
27. see Ryerson's article "Parliaments, Personalities and
Powers" in The Marxist Quarterly, #12, Winter 1965, pp 54-55
28. ibid, page 56.
29. ibid, page 57
30. ibid, pp 56-57
31. ibid, pp 57-58
32. see The Open Society, pp 107-108
33. ibid, pp 108-109
34. ibid, pp 110-111
35. ibid, page 115
36. ibid, pp 91-92
37. ibid, page 112
38. ibid, page 100
39. ibid, pp 81-89
40. ibid, pp 101-102
41. ibid, pp 102-103
42. ibid, pp 102-103
43. ibid, page 102
44. ibid.

45. ibid, page 117
46. see Ryerson's "Questions in Dispute", in The Marxist Quarterly, #15, 1965, page 68
47. see "Issues, Arguments, Understanding", by Ryerson, in The Marxist Quarterly, #17, Spring 1977, page 1.
48. idib, page 77
49. see Ryerson's article "Our Work with Ideas", in Viewpoint, volume 3, #5, 1966, page 57
50. ibid, page 58
51. ibid, page 60
52. ibid, pp 58-59

CHAPTER XII

RYERSON'S UNEQUAL UNION

Stanley Ryerson's most important book is Unequal Union: Confederation and the Roots of Conflict in the Canadas, 1815-1873. It is as the author of Unequal Union that he has gained his reputation among the ranks of left leaning political economists. In his preface, Ryerson claimed that with the completion of this, the second of the projected three volumes of the People's History of Canada, he had established "an outline sketch of some of the driving forces that brought into being our present economic and political structure". Neither volume was intended as a comprehensive effort to explain Canadian history. Rather, he saw them as a "preliminary breaking of ground, suggesting a line of approach to a re-interpretation of this country's history". It is fitting, then, that our appraisal of Ryerson's work criticizes him precisely on the problems associated with his "line of approach" to history.

His survey of the period from 1815 to 1873 was an attempt to present "a series of studies" rather than "an exhaustive narrative or analysis". Unlike his explicit

acknowledgment of the contribution made by Party members to The Founding of Canada, the Preface to Unequal Union says only that "in the sixteen years of intermittent research for this book and its predecessor" Ryerson had "piled up a debt of assistance rendered by a very large number of co-workers and friends".¹

Unequal Union contains a Prologue and a Polemical Appendix, both of which contain arguments about the materialist conception of history, and Marxist historiography. It is these two sections of the book that we will examine first.

In the Prologue, Ryerson provides us with a straightforwardly technicist definition of class, indicating that Unequal Union is constructed around the same theoretical framework he had employed in The Founding of Canada:

By social class, then, is meant a definite group of persons occupying in the social order a position that is determined by their relationship (as owners or non-owners) to the means of producing wealth. Slave-owner and slave, feudal overlord and serf, factory owner and hired wage-earner, all are historical examples of such groups. Thanks to a certain form of ownership (slaveholding, feudal tenure, capitalist proprietorship) one group is able to appropriate the fruits of labour of the other.²

This description of the concept of class coincides perfectly with the "distributional theory of class" found in the work of Stalin. Individuals are assigned to classes on the basis

of their relationship of ownership/non-ownership to the material means of producing wealth, whether that be machines, or muscle and bone. Then on the basis of a particular form of ownership of that factor of material production, individuals derive a particular revenue from a material process of production. Class exploitation concerns not the actual process of production (considered as a simultaneously material and social process), but the "appropriation" (i.e. distribution) of "the fruits of labour". The many other dimensions of class -- for example, those evident in the labour process and the state -- are simply not dealt with in the definition. When Ryerson does mention the state it is in a straightforwardly instrumentalist manner: he talks about the "possession of state-power" by a class, the state being "the apparatus of coercion on which a socially and economically dominant class relies in the last resort in order to maintain its rule".³ In other words, the political dimension of the social relations of capitalist production is still treated as secondary to and derivative from the economic base. Ryerson is still using the orthodox Stalinist distinction between the base and the superstructure.

Ryerson's entire discussion of class is premised upon that radical separation of a material technical labour process from a sphere of social relations of distribution, and an additional sphere of superstructural phenomena which is the

hallmark of Stalin's technicist conception of production..

Ryerson summarized his conception of the materialist conception of history in the following passage:

In this view, history is made by people acting, collectively and as individuals, in three intersecting areas of social being: that of the "metabolism" of man and nature, with man gradually (and latterly with growing acceleration) extending his mastery of natural forces, multiplying the productivity of labour, creating new technologies; that of class antagonism and conflict, rooted in social and economic contradictions, posing with mounting insistency the necessity of resolving the dilemma of social labour versus private appropriation; and (partly as a function of the foregoing yet with a certain autonomous logic of its own) the area of relations between national communities, the tensions and conflicts born of oppression of one people by another, and the urge of banish inequality, to break through to the "republic of man", the world community.⁴

For Ryerson, reality is broken down into three separate though "intersecting" areas, material production, social relations and national relations. His description is one which establishes only differences, not the unity which binds them together as a dialectical totality -- their character as the simultaneous products of human labour. The first sphere of reality, that of the metabolism of man and nature, is described in terms of technologies and the productivity of labour as a factor of production. There is no evidence of an understanding that the specifically capitalist labour process is not 'neutral' in

class terms. Ryerson says nothing to demonstrate that he sees the labour process as shaped and mediated by class relations (as is so evident in Marx's discussion of the formal and real subsumption of labour under capital for example). Similarly, his description of social relations is of a social sphere which does not interpenetrate with the labour process. Finally, national relations constitute a sphere of reality premised upon material production and social relations, but not reducible to them. Ryerson elaborates on this in his definition of a nation as:

a socio-ethnic community includ(ing) the following: a common language (this is its most specific trait ...); a common territory and economic life, which are the material bases for the cohesion and integration necessary to existence as a national community; and, arising on the foundation of all of these, a common culture and sense of identity. In this view, the nation is (like the class) a materially based social entity....⁵

On this account, national relations are accorded the same privileged position as language, after Stalin's intervention into the debates on linguistics during the fifties. In other words, national relations can be counted neither as part of the base nor as part of the superstructure. This interpretation is confirmed by Ryerson's explanation that:

The nation, as an enduring, historically formed community of people dwelling together and speaking a common tongue, is a phenomenon that

transcends specific forms of economic and political organization. If in the "West" it tended to reach maturity in the era of capitalism, its roots are earlier, and its vitality is not (as yet) diminished in socialist society. Underestimation of this phenomenon, and consequent oversimplified approaches to it, have long bedevilled dogmatic "Marxism".⁶

If Ryerson deviates from the old Stalinist orthodoxy in any crucial way, it is on the question of the role of the individual in history. Influenced by the trend within European Marxism to re-emphasize the importance of the role of the individual and subjectivity in history, for the first time Ryerson theoretically discusses the role of human subjectivity in history. In this, Ryerson was also following the Party line from Moscow, concerning the role of the individual in history -- a topic of new importance after the 1956 condemnation of the "cult of the personality" around Stalin. In the Prologue to Unequal Union, Ryerson writes:

It is the action of human beings that determines the course of history. Yet this history is more than the simple arithmetical sum of billions of individual biographies. It is in the context of an evolving social existence that individual decisions, initiatives, mistakes, achievements, occur and in varying degree are meaningful. In the interaction of the social setting and the individual, the former has priority -- but not that of an absolute power. The view that man's affairs are settled by ineluctable, impersonable and "calculable forces" to the exclusion of "human beings -- uncertain, personal and incalculable" -- is not Marxism, but a mechanistic determinism. Marx and Engels rejected the idea of history as a kind of metaphysical "person

apart" for whom "mankind is a mere mass bearing with it a varying degree of consciousness or unconsciousness...."⁷

Ryerson's explicit rejection of a metaphysical conception of history appears to be a qualitative step forward in his understanding of historical materialism. Yet, the question is whether this rejection of "mechanistic determinism" represents an isolated insight, or a thorough-going critique of Stalin's Marxism. The evidence would indicate that Ryerson actually failed to go to the root of the theoretical problem, and that his comments on the role of the individual were an eccentric addition to a theoretical framework which he otherwise preserved. As suggested above, the net effect is a self-contradictory version of historical materialism, which superficially places human agency at the centre of analysis, while retaining all the other features of Stalin's technicism.

In his "Polemical Postscript" Ryerson made it plain that he still saw the materialist conception of history as pitted against its number one enemy: "metaphysical idealism":

Where once theology reigned in historical interpretation, there took over the idealist metaphysic of the disembodied idea as prime mover of events.... That approach, which tends to give special privilege to the political idea, dominated the long era of constitutionalist historiography in this country.⁸

Yet Ryerson noted that a "counter-current" had set in early in the twentieth century. It took into account the importance of economic developments in history, yet the historians who used

it (he specifically mentions Arthur Lower), still espoused a historical-idealist conception of history based upon a "miscellaneous eclectic assembling of factors, no one of which is seen as casually determinant". Most importantly, this approach to history remained completely uninformed about the need to place those factors in their context within "the evolution of a specific socio-economic 'formation' or social system: capitalism". For these historians, capitalism is not a social structure, not a social reality, but merely a psychological attitude.⁹

Having disposed of simple and more complex versions of metaphysical idealism, Ryerson then turned to examine the work of Innis as constituting a "decisive advance toward a scientific historiography", that advance being attributed to Innis's exhaustive examination of "the main areas of activity on which the economy of Canada has been founded".¹⁰ Pursuing the argument first formulated in his 1947 piece entitled "Conflicting Approaches in the Social Sciences", Ryerson summarized the staples thesis as a theory of "the evolution of techniques, their relationship with geographic environment, and their influence on economic change ... as the determinants in this country's development". As in 1947 and 1962, Ryerson criticized Innis not for his reductionist view of human production as exclusively material, but for failing to add on a class dimension as the "framework of socio-political relationships" within which an essentially material process of production is carried on.

In one long, critical passage, Ryerson demonstrated that his criticisms of Innis's work still had not extended to a criticism of a technicist conception of human production:

Undoubtedly, geography and technique were of crucial importance for economic development. But they operated within a framework of socio-political relationships.... It is just these socio-economic and political relationships -- class and property relationships -- that Innis in effect ignored. C.B. Macpherson has argued that Innis's approach was one of "taking for granted the profit and power dynamics of capitalist enterprise" -- while finding the driving force of economic growth in "the application of changing technologies to abundant natural resources". But one cannot simply "take for granted" the dynamics of capitalism and still explain the driving forces of economic development".... A mechanist, one sided fixation on the "role" of a single product or of one element in technology (from wood-pulp as a staple, to media of communication, as in the Innis-to-McLuhan trajectory) -- abstracted from social structure, leads to a new idealist metaphysic.¹¹

Ryerson begins his criticism with the complaint that Innis ignored the existence of the social framework within which production occurs. He then cites Macpherson's rationalization that Innis took certain capitalist social relations for granted while finding the "driving force" of development and history in what can only be described as a reductionist and technicist conception of material production. Ryerson's criticism is then directed not against Innis's technicist concept of human production as an exclusively material process, but toward the idea that social relations cannot be taken for granted. He voices no objection to Innis's technicist view of production;

no objection which sees it as mechanistic because it abstracts the material-technical process of production from the social structure. This represents no theoretical advance from the views found in A World to Win or any of his other pre-1956 writings. Those who doubt the fundamental continuity in Ryerson's theoretical framework might object that his Unequal Union really does contain a new and specifically Marxist conception of human production, citing his quotation from Marx as evidence:

Marx commented (writes Ryerson -BM) that Proudhon had "grasped the fact that men produce cloth, linen, silks --- What he had not grasped is that these men, according to their powers, also produced the social relations amid which they prepare cloth and linen." ¹²

This quotation cannot be taken as evidence of a rejection of Stalinism, for the simple reason that Ryerson had used the very same quote in both his 1947 and 1962 critiques of Innis. ¹³ In other words, whatever Ryerson understood Marx's comments to mean, it was never viewed as being incompatible with the crude technicism of Stalin's tradition of Marxism.

We are forced to conclude that Unequal Union illustrates the fundamental continuity between Ryerson's pre-1956 writings, and those of the 1960s. The new sensitivity to the role of the individual did not indicate a dramatic re-orientation in Ryerson's understanding of Marxism. His "critique" of "mechanistic determinism" carried far enough to place a new

emphasis on the role of the individual, but did not constitute a rejection of the technicist conception of production as a material process. Ryerson's inconsistency indicates, that his new insight was mechanically grafted onto the old theoretical framework -- a perspective which completely vitiated the new insight anyway.

As mentioned above, Ryerson's survey of the period from 1815 to 1873 was an attempt to present "a series of studies" rather than "an exhaustive narrative or analysis". Those studies comprise the three parts of Ryerson's book (apart from those methodological and conceptual issues covered in the Prologue and the Polemical Index) "Canada's "bourgeois democratic revolution" in 1837-1838, the industrialization of the Canadas throughout the mid-nineteenth century and the process of colonial unification culminating in Confederation. Of these, only the first is discussed here in detail, since it provides a useful basis for comparing Ryerson's theoretical work in 1968 and 1937 -- the two occasions on which he analyzed the rebellions in depth. Ryerson's 1968 account of the rebellion illustrates a fundamental continuity with his pre-1956 historical and theoretical analyses, despite the developments of the 1960s. His discussion of the rebellions is shaped by Stalin's version of historical materialism, and represents little innovation since his 1937 treatment of the same historical event. The following discussion is also intended to illustrate -- in a modest way --

some of the empirical consequences of a failure to keep labour and class struggle at the centre of a Marxist analysis of history.

Ryerson begins Part I of his book (called "Revolt Against Colonialism") with an explanation of the source of the struggles that mounted after the War of 1812 and culminated in the 1837-38 rebellions. He states the central theme of the first-third of the book on the first page of Chapter One, where he invokes the contradiction between the forces and relations of production in the colonies as the cause of the rebellions. In the following passage, he formulates the central conflict between native capitalist industry and the restrictions imposed by colonialism and the local ruling class as the dynamic which motivated the events of 1837-38 :

The settlers' grievances expressed not only vexation over abuses, but the pressure of productive forces striving for growth, held back by fetters of vested property and privilege. A native capitalist industry was in the making; but landlordism and colonial rule lay athwart its path. The settlers in the colonial provinces carried on a stubborn many-sided struggle against the local oligarchy of landowners, merchants and officials, and against the oppressive rule of the British colonial office. This struggle embraced practically every aspect of life in the Canadas; the land question (land monopoly and feudalism); freedom of trade and manufacture, native industry and capitalist development; political democracy; national self-determination in French Canada; and Canadian independence.¹⁴

Thus, from the very beginning of his account of the rebellions, the agents of historical development are abstract structures --

the forces and relations of production (defined in the Stalinist sense) -- which employ human beings for resolving the contradictions created by the structures themselves. That is why he states that the settlers' grievances only "express" the underlying reality of the productive forces (inadequately described only as "native capitalist industry") "striving" for growth against the blockages created by the existing property relations.

The central contradiction Ryerson describes in Unequal Union lacks some of the sharpness of his 1937 analysis of the rebellions. In his central thesis then, Ryerson had written:

The 1837 rebellion was in aim and content an anti-feudal, anti-colonial bourgeois democratic revolution ... waged by the rising capitalist class against the medieval restrictions of feudalism, and for the conquest of democratic rights, state power and independent nationhood. ¹⁵

In his book 1837 Ryerson had not shrunk from posing the contradiction behind the rebellion as one between the productive forces embodied in a rising industrial capitalist class and the specifically "feudal" property relations which fettered the drive of the productive forces. In Unequal Union the burgeoning productive forces are undoubtedly those of an indigenous capitalist class (indeed, the rise of an industrial bourgeoisie is the central motif of Part I of the book) but the character of the existing social relations of production within the Canadas is left quite vague. Their "colonial"

character is constantly reiterated, but they are also variously described as "mercantile", "semi-feudal" and "feudal".¹⁶ In short, Ryerson does not seem able to determine what the character of the relations of production prevailing in the Canadas in 1837 actually was. (The reader will recall that in his 1937 account, Ryerson had described the social formation in the rebellion era as a type of "commercialized feudalism", but feudalism nevertheless.) As we shall see, this inability to provide a clear-cut characterization of the rebellion era relations of production causes serious problems for his overall analysis. For the moment, however, it is necessary to turn to some of the other features of his analysis.

Dealing first with the rebellions in Lower Canada, Ryerson discusses the all important land question. For him, the oppressive level of seigneurial exactions from the Lower Canadian peasantry coupled with the flow of English merchant capital into the purchase of seigneuries and the gift of huge tracts of land to London speculators all combined to make the rebellion necessary. (He even concedes that the extension of investment capital into the purchase of seigneuries created "pressure to transform semi-feudal institutions into capitalist real-estate".)¹⁷ Ryerson ties this back to his central theme about the blockages to industrial capitalist development, explaining that "the land monopoly and seigneurial tenure impeded settlement, the spread of communications and the growth

of a home market, and blocked the path of industrial development".¹⁸

Even though Ryerson is arguing the position that the colonial connection of the Canadas with Britain impeded industrial growth, he himself provides plenty of evidence to the contrary. He details "the beginnings of industrialism" in the pre-rebellion colonies which created "the first signs of a challenge to the old mercantile-seigneurial ruling group". This early growth of industrialism was a process "directly related to the impact of the Industrial revolution in Britain", although this process "operated within the framework of capitalism".¹⁹ This creates the impression that far from impeding industrialism, the colonial connection with Britain -- as mediated by the merchants and colonial officialdom -- was actually encouraging it, at least during some periods. In other words, inherent in Ryerson's own account are the seeds of alternative view" one that does not ascribe the cause of the rebellion simply to the prevention of industrial capitalist expansion by mercantile-colonial relations.

But there is more. Ryerson saw the industrial capitalist transformation of Britain providing both surplus capital for investment in the colonies, as well as a surplus of "free" wage labour -- both entering a Lower Canadian economy in crisis due to agrarian overpopulation and chronic economic stagnation. Nevertheless, he admits that the land monopoly which blocked

the population in both the Canadas from the acquisition of free land had been designed to create a class of wage workers in addition to boosting the price of land. This again seems to undercut his argument that the colonial connection and the existing ruling class within the Canadas was simply and straightforwardly opposed to industrialism. With merchants opposed to the continuation of seigneurial tenure, the land monopoly helping to create a working class, the beginnings of industrial development, and an influx of both capital and wage labourers, Ryerson seems to have undercut his own argument about the colonial connection to Britain having inhibited industrial capitalist development.

In his review of Unequal Union W.G. Ormsby pointed out that Ryerson provided little, if any, real evidence to substantiate his claim that the colonial connection between Britain and the Canadas actually blocked industrial capitalist development.²⁰ Instead of carefully weighing the benefits and the liabilities of that connection for the growth of an indigenous industrial capitalism, Ryerson simply asserts the negative effects it had, in keeping with his need to establish an unequivocal contradiction between the forces of a native capitalist industrialism and the existing relations of production. Thus, despite his many concessions to the position that colonialism encouraged industrial development in the colonies, Ryerson is compelled to make a simplistic and wide

sweeping generalization by the demands of his theoretical framework.

Ryerson's central argument in this account of the causes of the rebellion -- that the colonial connection impeded industrial capitalist development leading to economic stagnation and rebellion -- undercuts the more balanced approach suggested in The Founding of Canada. Discussing the aftermath of the Conquest, Ryerson explained that among the changes in the colony's situation resulting from that event, was the following:

Capitalist development in Britain (with the industrial revolution getting under way there) being much further ahead than was the case in France, the potentialities for economic and industrial growth in the colony were enhanced: as the example of the Atlantic colonies clearly showed. (At the same time, as this example also indicated, capitalist growth in the colony had to assert itself against the restrictive efforts of the imperial metropolis.)²¹

Here Ryerson seemed prepared to weigh both the benefits and detriments of the colonial connection for the early industrial development of the colonies of British North America. Perhaps the rise of a fierce anti-imperialism in the New Left of the sixties pushed him to abandon even the suggestion that colonialism might have encouraged economic development -- albeit of a somewhat different character to that which occurred in the imperial power.

In Unequal Union Ryerson argued the growth of industrial capitalism presupposed a decline in the "self-sufficient natural

economy" of Lower Canada; a growth in commerce, and the availability of labour as a commodity.²² According to him, these conditions began to be fulfilled following the War of 1812:

Trade in agricultural produce, the demands of war, and the growth of small scale local industries, combined to break down the self-sufficient habitant pioneer economy. The shift from fur trade to timber trade accelerated this process.... (by enlarging -BM) the home-market and at the same time stimulat(ing) further industrial beginnings.²³

This accounts for the growth of commerce and the decline of the self-sufficient "feudal" mode of production (as Ryerson occasionally calls it) in Lower Canada. The availability of labour came -- of course -- with the waves of immigration through the 1820s and 1830s. Having identified the decline of feudal production into crisis (discussed further below) and the existence of wage labour as a commodity (i.e. the presence of wage labour as a form of revenue acquisition), Ryerson set about establishing the quantitative significance of waged labour in accordingly 'capitalist' industries. In establishing the strength of industrial capitalism in the colonial Canadas, Ryerson's inquiry was guided by the old Stalinist conception of a mode of production as hinging critically on the level of development of technique, the form of property ownership, and the form adopted by revenue acquisition. (For example, in describing the development of industrial capitalism in Britain, Ryerson wrote:

(whether a "formal" or "real" process of subsumption) that Marx saw as so vital to an understanding of the laws of motion of the capitalist mode of production, the ideological expression of capitalism in commodity fetishism, and the process of early capitalist forms of class struggle (like machine breaking, etc.). Predictably, Ryerson exhibited his technicism in a discussion of industrial development in the decades following the rebellion by singling out for citation one of Marx's best known aphorisms, a comment which makes him appear to subscribe to the crassest form of technological determinism:

The transition to large-scale factory industry was just beginning to become possible with the introduction of the steam engine and steam-driven machinery.... the emergent colonial manufactures were approaching the watershed between production by hand and production by machine, of which Marx wrote in 1847: "The hand mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist". It was industrial capitalists that were in the making in mid-century British North America.²⁴

Ryerson summarized his discussion of the beginnings of industrial capitalism in Lower Canada, with the following assessment of the different lines of development:

Capitalist industry in Lower Canada appears to have started developing in these years along three fairly distinct paths. One follows the line of growth of the timber trade: sawmills and shipyards are its focal points. A second, more directly an outgrowth of the industrial revolution in England, leads to the establishment of manufacturing and machine shops.... In both cases, it is English or Anglo-Canadian capitalists who are in command, while the work force is French

Canadian, except for certain skilled tradesmen from Britain. A third line of growth, only weakly developed ... is in the small scale consumer goods enterprises emerging in the towns and villages in response to the gradual extension of the domestic market. Here is the birth place of a French Canadian industrial bourgeoisie. The rising "middle class" in Lower Canada was not only made up of notaries, doctors, shopkeepers: it included a few manufacturers as well.²⁵

Naming potteries, hat manufactories, and carriage works located in the agricultural regions of Lower Canada as examples of the French Canadian path to industrial capitalism, Ryerson hoped to lay an adequate basis for his claim that genuine industrial capitalists could be found among the ranks of the reform movement in Lower Canada (as well as Upper Canada). Ignoring the all-important difference between industrial capitalism and artisanal manufacturing,²⁶ Ryerson believed that to establish the "bourgeois-democratic" character of the rebellions, he had to establish the existence of an industrial capitalist bourgeoisie; hence the conflation of industrial capitalism and artisanal manufacturing.

Having established the existence of three distinct currents of capitalist industrialism within Lower Canada, Ryerson proceeded to explain that all three were being frustrated in their natural growth by "the restrictive conditions of a colonial mercantile environment".²⁷ In the following quote, he outlines the constellation of class forces supposedly blocking capitalist development:

Capital and wage labour: these were the key ingredients in the new economic order launched by the technological upheaval of the 1870s in Britain. Privately-owned factories using steam driven machinery and employing hired "hands": these were the end product of a whole historical epoch. (My emphasis) ²⁸

Similarly, in his analysis of the pre-rebellion level of capitalist industrialization, Ryerson wrote:

In Upper Canada and the Maritimes, as in ... Lower Canada, the early nineteenth century presents a picture of the varied stages of (a -BM) ... process of change, the outcome of which is industrial capitalism: the system of large-scale, factory, machine production carried out by wage workers hired by the factory owners whose aim is to "make money" through extracting profits. ²⁹

Not surprisingly, the simple identification of industrial capitalism as pertaining to the relations of distribution and the technical levels of production within individual enterprises, did not contribute to Ryerson's ability to explain the character of the social formation prevalent in the Canadas. Nowhere does he make an effort to identify the presence of any of the laws of motion that characterize the capitalist mode of production. His description of the industries existing in pre-1837 Lower Canada centers around the level of development of the technical process of production in the timber trade, shipbuilding, the St. Maurice Forges, and a rope works. In Unequal Union there is no discussion of anything like the phenomenon of the subsumption of labour under capital within the labour process.

Power in the colony was in the hands of a triple alliance of class forces, none of which was particularly interested in the growth of a native industry as such. Imperial advantage and imperial trade were what concerned the British officials and the English Canadian merchant-landowners; while their collaborators, the French Canadian clergy and seigneurs, were committed to uphold the policies of the other two -- the dominant -- ruling groups. The forces of indigenous industrialism were thus to find themselves increasingly at odds with the imperial-mercantile framework whose chief upholders and beneficiaries were those leaders of the "commercial empire of the St. Lawrence" ... (the -BM) "importers, timber merchants, grain dealers, ship owners and bank shareholders"30

Ryerson is here content to make a negative argument for his analysis: none of the ruling groups had a vested interest in any of the currents of industrial development. But besides failing to prove that they actively opposed and resisted the efforts of manufacturers to develop industry, Ryerson also neglects the point that much of the imperial trade in the early nineteenth century was in timber, providing a link between some of the merchants and one of the paths of industrial development he had mapped out. As we suggested above, Ryerson's own work establishes that at least some industrial development was stimulated by the colonial connection.

But there is more evidence that Ryerson seriously overstated his case regarding the restrictive character of the colonial connection and the presence of merchants for industrial development. Compelled by his theoretical framework to locate

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the strategic contradiction between a "feudal", "semi-feudal" or "mercantile" ruling oligarchy and an indigenous industrial capitalist class, Ryerson ignored many of the other ways in which the colonial connection and the presence of merchant capital fostered industrialism. Ormsby writes in his review of Unequal Union that among the benefits of that connection were the following: efforts to settle the colonies contributing to the creation of a home market; investment in canal construction and other infrastructure; an influx of capital connected with defence; the timber trade; and the expansion of the milling industry because of the preference on Canadian flour in the British market. Ormsby concludes that:

To make a distinction between merchant and industrial capital in the colonies and to attribute pro-imperial sentiments to the former and anti-imperial sentiments to the latter ... ignores the evidence. Many capitalists were engaged in both mercantile and industrial enterprises; and, in any case, most of the industrial bourgeoisie did not reveal an anti-imperial bias.³¹

These comments are echoed, to some extent, in the work of H. Clare Pentland (himself briefly a member of the CPC during the 1930s),³² so Ryerson can not have been unaware of them -- having cited the writings of Pentland (including Pentland's then unpublished PhD thesis "Labour and the Development of Industrial Capitalism in Canada") in both The Founding of Canada and Unequal Union.³³ (Ryerson actually devotes very little attention to the writings of Pentland, referring to

them primarily for information on the Lachine canal strikes. This totally undeserved lack of attention to Pentland's work is unexplainable, except perhaps in terms of the many problems his more subtle analysis might have created for Ryerson's schematic Party line version of events. In his thesis, Pentland identifies the creation of a surplus producing agriculture in Upper Canada, around stable local markets provided by the presence of the British army, the timber trade, and the constant flow of immigrants, as crucial to the eventual development of a well rounded industrializing economy. Besides these contributions of the colonial connection, Pentland focuses on the construction of infrastructure -- canals and railways -- as the factors which triggered the process of capitalist development that was "visible in 1830, unmistakable in 1980". On Pentland's account, the Montreal merchant interests unwittingly played a central role in the capitalist development of the province, even before the construction of the railways -- about which Ryerson has a lot to say. As Pentland demonstrates, the construction of such infrastructure -- both for military and commercial purposes -- brought huge sums of capital into the colony (creating opportunities for local capital accumulation), fostered the local production of capital goods, created a home market in agricultural products and consumer goods for the employees of such projects, attracted skilled workmen and

artisans to the colony, and provided waterpower sites for manufacturing concerns.³⁴ In this manner the merchants devoted to commercial trade in staples and either hostile or indifferent to industrial diversification contributed to industrial development. As Pentland summarizes the point:

It is a supreme irony of history that the improvements made to the St. Lawrence system of water transport, and the railways that duplicated and supplemented it, were conceived by those who dreamt of binding Canada more firmly into the system of transatlantic exchange, were financed by British governments and investors having the same expectation, yet had the opposite effect of creating a viable Canadian economy.³⁵

Pentland also shed greater light on the contribution of the military and civil officials to industrial development of the colony. Despite their absolute commitment to developing imperial wealth and power, their concern with the colony's defence capabilities directed their attention towards the level of diversification and self-sufficiency in the Canadas -- factors of great significance in a time of war. For that reason, projects such as the construction of the Rideau canal were undertaken directly by the state.

Finally, Pentland attaches little apparent significance to the rebellions of 1837-38, as a factor of any particular significance in Canada's industrial capitalist development, preferring to argue that the process was well under way regardless of such political developments.³⁶

Throughout the decade of the 1830s social pressure mounted, exacerbated by both an international economic crisis and by a severe agricultural crisis in Lower Canada. Ryerson dates the origins of the latter to the beginning of the decade, and proves incapable of explaining how the social relations of production in Lower Canadian agriculture led to the crisis. Instead, he falls back on precisely the sort of explanation one might expect from a theorist who analyses the material process of production in isolation from the reproduction of the existing society:

The disastrous agricultural decline dating from the early 1830s (was caused by -BM) ... exhaustion of soil through the persistent use of backward techniques, compounded by the plague of the wheat fly, (both of which -BM) ... caused the collapse of wheat farming in the St. Lawrence and Richelieu valleys. 37.

To this conception of the agricultural crisis in Lower Canada as a "technical" problem associated with a specific assembly of material-technical factors of production, McNally has recently posed some of the social features of production that a specifically Marxist analysis of the crisis would have to account for. With his view:

The roots of agricultural crisis in Quebec and (the) consequent failure of integrated industrial development would be located in the dynamics of the relations of surplus extraction and production. The seigneurial system in Lower Canada would then have to be studied in terms of its tendency to raise rents and obligations in order to increase absolute surplus production and thereby to

impoverish the habitant. The impoverishment of the habitant resulted in a lack of agricultural investment, depletion of the soil, and a recurrent pattern of agricultural crises. (Thus -BM) ... the social relations of exploitation -- not the technical structures of soil exploitation -- generated stagnation and crisis in the Quebec economy of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.³⁸

One can search through Unequal Union in vain for anything like an effort to explain the agricultural crisis in such terms.

Imprisoned as he was by a technicist conception of production, Ryerson proved incapable of explaining the crisis of the old regime in Lower Canada in terms which linked the existing social relations of peasant production to the types of techniques employed in the actual labour process.

Ryerson's treatment of politics in Unequal Union generally confirms his continued adherence to the technicism of the Stalinist tradition. In the context of his discussion of the rebellions, Ryerson talks about the contradiction between the mercantile-colonial regime and the rising industrial capitalist class as having its "political expression" in the struggle over the state structure and the absence of responsible government.³⁹

On another note, Ryerson replicated his earlier Popular Front style account of the class struggle in the Lower Canadian rebellion, as originally pioneered in 1837, and upgraded in French Canda. Ryerson duly noted the split between the bourgeois and petit bourgeois sections of the Lower Canadian

reform movement in the years before the rebellion. Ryerson quite correctly points out that the former feared the possible consequences of a struggle against the colonial state apparatus, which must depend upon mass agitation.⁴⁰ However, he pays much less attention to the split between Papineau and the more radical sections of the Patriotes leadership in early 1838. In his discussion of the rebellion, Ryerson glosses over the differences, saying only that "Papineau had withdrawn from the struggle".⁴¹ In listing the reasons for the failure of the rebellion, Ryerson says a little more:

The leaders of the Patriote movement, mainly petty bourgeois in social composition, in their agitation and program largely evaded the issue of struggle against feudal tenure and did not organize mass struggle in the countryside for its abolition; most of these same leaders, in the military showdown, failed to stand the test...⁴²

Ryerson only really deals with the question of Papineau's position on seigneurial tenure, and the resultant split between him and Nelson in 1838 some 200 pages later in the book. He relegates the issue to Chapter 14 of his text, making it part of a general discussion of the abolition of seigneurial tenure in 1854.⁴³ Separating the discussion of this issue from that of the rebellion has the effect -- whether intentional or not -- of artificially isolating a problematic aspect of his account from the body of his discussion. His actual discussion of the problem in Unequal

Union presented nothing new from the 1943 discussion in French Canada (as presented in an earlier chapter of this thesis).

In his account of the Upper Canadian rebellion, in Chapters Four, Five and Six of Unequal Union, Ryerson employed the same central theme as he had throughout the previous discussion of the cause of the rebellions in Lower Canada -- the contradiction between burgeoning industrial capitalist forces of production, and the restrictive colonial-mercantile property relations. (In Unequal Union he seemed less prepared to identify the relations of production prevailing in Upper Canada as being "feudal" in character than he had been during the 1930s).

Ryerson's description of the purpose behind Upper Canadian land policies is quite important. He says British colonialism was motivated by a concern:

to implant a society dominated by large landowners and merchants, safeguarded from infections of (American style) BM republicanism. The aim of creating a colonial aristocracy was to be furthered by the practice of granting large estates to army officers, government officials, wealthy merchants. 44

He had actually touched on the same idea in The Founding of Canada:

In Upper Canada, by setting up a frontier aristocracy of owners of large estates (tilled by royal soldier settlers), the imperial rulers had sought to erect a Loyalist bulwark against

American subversion. The effort was only partly successful. It proved impossible to limit settlement to the Loyalists alone ... large numbers of American settlers moved into the province.⁴⁵

However, in that discussion Ryerson had noted that this system of land grants was quickly

supplemented by a new type of business venture. Large scale landownership, despite its ancient lineage as a feudal institution, was by now firmly enmeshed in the cash relationships of a mercantile society.... Acquisition of estates for speculative purposes linked with government sponsored colonization schemes, was becoming an object of active interest on the part of "persons who, with different objects in view, were desirous of employing their capital in the settlement and cultivation of lands in Canada".⁴⁶

The identification of "large-scale landownership" -- a property form in a material factor of production -- as a specifically "feudal institution" is indicative of Ryerson's theoretical difficulty. Using the standard tools of Stalin's Marxism, he can not quite figure out the nature of either the society British colonialism intended to create, or the one that actually developed in Upper Canada. If anything, his description from The Founding of Canada seems to hark back to his earlier notion of "commercialized feudalism".

Throughout the Unequal Union account of the rebellions Ryerson displays uncertainty about the nature of society in the Canadas during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. On the one hand he speaks of "mercantile capitalism"

or "mercantile colonialism" as the prevailing form of society in the Canadas; on the other hand he speaks of Britain as being in a four century transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism.⁴⁷ Hence the confusing mixture of ideas producing a menagerie of concepts akin to his earlier "commercialized feudalism". This shows Ryerson at his most confused, grasping at isolated social forms like large-scale private ownership of land as a factor of production, in an effort to periodize history. In this case his efforts were frustrated, because Stalinist theory had not developed Marx's originally very sketchy analysis of the period of the primitive accumulation of capital, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries in Britain. As a result, he was forced back into describing the social formation in Upper Canada as being "mercantile" in character. The large-scale absence of the forms of property and revenue acquisition the Stalinist tradition used to identify the presence of the "feudal" and "capitalist" modes of production meant he had to resort to the form of commerce prevailing in Upper Canada to determine the nature of the social relations prevailing in that colony.

The problem with this, as Marx makes clear in Capital, is that merchant capital is common to many different modes of production, and therefore it is inadequate to identify a mode of production as "mercantile". For Marx, merchant's capital was "penned in the sphere of circulation", requiring:

no other conditions for its existence ... outside those necessary for the simple circulation of commodities and money ... no matter what the basis on which products are produced, which are thrown into circulation as commodities -- whether the basis of the primitive community, of slave production, of small peasant and petty bourgeois, or the capitalist basis....48

For Marx, the defining feature of merchant's capital is its non-subjection of production under itself; it develops in a parasitic relation to a mode of production which is independent of it. That parasitic character of merchant's capital is evident in Marx's following comment:

The development of commerce and merchant capital gives rise everywhere to the tendency towards production of exchange values, increases its volume, multiplies it, makes it cosmopolitan, and develops money into world money. Commerce, therefore, has a more or less dissolving influence everywhere on the producing organization, which it finds at hand and whose different forms are mainly carried on with a view to use value. To what extent it brings about a dissolution of the old mode of production depends on its solidity and internal structure. And wither this process of dissolution will lead ... does not depend on commerce, but on the character of the old mode of production itself. 49

In other words, Marx's analysis of merchant capital points us toward the character of the existing class relations to explain the transition from one mode of production to another. The character of the class structure and the course of the class struggle in the transition from feudalism to capitalism was the cause "for the transformation of the crafts, the rural

industries, and feudal agriculture, into capitalist enterprises"; ⁵⁰ commerce was only its precondition. In the Grundrisse Marx discusses the transition from feudalism to capitalism, explaining that:

The age of dissolution of the earlier modes of production and relations of the worker to the objective conditions of labour, is simultaneously an age in which monetary wealth has already developed to a certain extent, and also one in which it is rapidly growing and expanding, by means of the circumstances which accelerate this dissolution. Just as it is itself an agent of that dissolution, so that dissolution is the condition of its transformation into capital. But the mere existence of monetary wealth, even its conquest of a sort of supremacy, is not sufficient for the dissolution to result in capital. If it were, then ancient Rome, Byzantium, etc. would have concluded their history with free labour and capital, or rather, would have entered upon a new history. There the dissolution of the old relations of property was also tied to the development of monetary wealth -- of commerce, etc. However, in fact the result of this dissolution was not industry, but the domination of countryside over city.⁵¹

Many of the problems with Ryerson's analysis of the rebellions stem from an inability to recognize that the transition being effected in the Canadas was not from feudalism or "commercialized feudalism" (or even "mercantile-colonialism") to industrial capitalism. The rebellions in 1837-1838 were those of an agrarian capitalist society (discussed further below). Ryerson's problem in describing the social relations characteristic of the rebellion era Canadas can be traced back to his difficulties in dealing with the nature of the bourgeois democratic revolutions in general. The point can be made by taking

a slight digression to examine Ryerson's assessment of the first "bourgeois democratic revolution" in England, as analysed in The Founding of Canada.

In Chapter XVII of the first volume of the People's History of Canada (titled "The English Revolution. Contest for Empire") Ryerson presents his interpretation of the bourgeois revolution in England in the context of an attempt to account for the differing pace of development in the colonies of New France and New England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵² There he identified "the advance in trade and early forms of manufacture" as the driving force behind the bourgeois revolution in England. In his account, the English monarchy had been transformed ~~from~~ an early ally of "the rising bourgeoisie" to "a bulwark of feudal aristocratic reaction," by the seventeenth century.

The sharpening contest between king and parliament over control of the public purse reflected the fundamental conflict between feudal aristocratic state and property relations on the one hand and the fast growing power of the bourgeoisie on the other.⁵³

The revolution was thus a straightforward confrontation between the productive forces represented by the urban bourgeoisie and the property relations of feudalism. Ryerson describes the outcome of the event in these terms:

It took seven years of civil war and the execution of the king to establish bourgeois rule in England. The "supremacy of parliament" meant the role of the great merchants and allied gentry who controlled it.⁵⁴

The landed gentry, who get the benefit of being the allies of the bourgeoisie in Ryerson's assessment, are also credited with deepening the revolution:

The landed aristocrats -- in a move that in fact carried the bourgeois revolution a step forward -- secured, in place of feudal tenure, outright ownership of their domains.⁵⁵

There are several weaknesses with Ryerson's account of the revolution. First, and in many ways most important, is the tendency to assign the leading role to the bourgeoisie. In a recent article reviewing the literature "Marxism and the English Civil War", Carlin surveys the role of the various classes in England's bourgeois revolution.⁵⁶ After distinguishing between the largely royalist big gentry and the revolutionary lesser gentry, and the royalist and revolutionary factions within the bourgeoisie, she explains that:

The vanguard of the revolution in 1642 was neither the gentry nor the bourgeoisie, but those classes which in late feudal society were exploited, or threatened with exploitation, by both ... the independent small producers ... the political situation was transformed between 1640 and 1642 by a massive popular revolt: it was this that polarized the gentry and bourgeoisie into those who thought they could take over and control the upsurge and those who saw support of the king as much the lesser evil.⁵⁷

Carlin identifies these small independent producers as small tenant farms, and urban artisans. Following in their wake came some landless peasants and members of the urban working class. She argues the thesis that the Levellers and the Diggers

represented not simply the aspirations of a small bourgeoisie, but were actually anti-capitalist. Their suppression by Cromwell and the lesser gentry ultimately preserved the gains of the revolution for the bourgeoisie, even though the under-classes had actually been both the initiating and the driving force behind the revolution. 58

What is most significant for our purposes is that the bourgeoisie was neither the instigating nor the most consistently revolutionary class. In fact, at several key junctures -- such as in 1649 -- "only a militant minority of the bourgeoisie in London and elsewhere, supported the revolution".

The tactics of the bourgeoisie were shaped by the fact that they were fighting on two fronts: against reaction from above and radical revolution from below. Their economic and political aims were essentially moderate, appropriate to the pre-industrial economy rather than to the aggressive free-trading industrial capitalism of the future. They did not wish to do away with all privilege, corporate organization and state direction. 59

Not only did Ryerson misappraise the role of the bourgeoisie and ignore the role of the underclasses, he ignored the overall importance of the rural struggle to the post-revolutionary developments. The development of capitalism was, for him, primarily connected with industrial and commercial growth, rather than agriculture and the class struggle in the countryside. Thus, when he compared the English bourgeoisie which he had described as the leading force of the English revolution with that in Holland, he wrote:

Unlike the Dutch, whose strength resided primarily in a vast accumulation of commercial capital, the English bourgeoisie were manufacturers as well as merchants.⁶⁰

Ryerson proceeded to describe some of the manufacturing industries prevalent in sixteenth and seventeenth century England, while ignoring entirely the development of capitalist agriculture. In Ryerson's view, the successful development of capitalism within England clearly hinges upon the development of industry and commerce following the English revolution.

With this judgment, Ryerson is guilty of the most elementary mistake imaginable. Not even the very early Communist Party historians in Britain had been foolish enough to ignore the crucial character of agricultural development in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In A People's History of England written by A.L. Morton in 1938 -- a book which, incidentally, Ryerson had mentioned in the acknowledgements as having "been of very great assistance" to his research -- there appears the following judgment on the importance of agriculture to English capitalist development:

Not only was agriculture by far the most important of English industries in the Eighteenth Century, but the changes which took place at this time in agricultural technique and organization, and in the distribution of the classes among the rural population, created conditions without which the Industrial Revolution would have been impossible. It is, therefore, necessary to begin any account of the Industrial Revolution with the series of events that completed the

long drawn out transformation of agriculture from a subsistence to a capitalist industry.⁶¹

Disregarding the technicist flavour of Morton's comments, at least he came close to identifying the period between the "bourgeois revolution" and the "industrial revolution" as being one characterized by agrarian capitalism. By contrast, Ryerson's obsession with industrial development (and to a lesser extent, commerce) as the driving force behind the development of capitalism betrays a crude (even for someone working within the Stalinist tradition) identification of capitalism with the spread of industrial machine production.

This is no great surprise, when we consider the orthodox Stalinist conception of the capitalist productive forces as machinery -- preferably heavy machinery. In Stalin's Russia heavy industry was the alpha and omega of the advance of the "productive forces" in the march toward "socialism". (Just recall Stalin's example of the outcome of World War II being entirely a function of which side had more motors, as cited above in Ryerson's discussion of dialectics.) Because of this identification of the productive forces of capitalism with industrial machinery, Ryerson could easily ignore the importance of the agrarian class struggle and agricultural development to the origins of capitalism. It should come as no surprise that in his assessment of the Canadian "bourgeois democratic revolution" Ryerson followed the same line of interpretation, concentrating on the role of an "industrial" bourgeoisie in explaining the rise of "industrial" capitalism, while ignoring the independent interests of the

agrarian underclasses and the general importance of agrarian development. But before persuing this point, we need to discuss the development of agrarian capitalism in England further.

What had emerged in the transition from feudalism to capitalism within England was not immediately industrial capitalism, with a simple class structure polarized between industrial capital and labour. Instead, what first emerged was the classic landlord - capitalist tenant - agricultural wage labourer class structure of agrarian capitalism, premised upon the increased extraction of surplus labour through systematic capital investment designed to boost productivity. (This contrasted with the labour squeezing methods of increasing surplus labour through increasing the length of the working day, etc.)⁶²

Brenner argues that England was exempt from the general European agricultural and economic crisis of the seventeenth century because its transition to agrarian capitalism enabled it to avoid the decline in agricultural productivity which sparked the crisis. More importantly, the development of agrarian capitalism created the possibility for an export boom in cloth to lead to industrial development. For the first time, agricultural production did not undercut manufactures, as Brenner explains:

The inelasticity of agricultural output, it seems, had always set strict limits on the development of industrial production. Rising food prices, if not a total failure of food supply, resulting from declining agricultural productivity might directly stymie industry by limiting the proportion of the population which could devote itself to non-agricultural

pursuits. Otherwise they would undermine the markets for industrial goods either by forcing up wages (the cost of subsistence) and thus industrial prices or by cutting into the proportion of the population's income which was available for non-food purchases. These mechanisms meant ... the general agricultural-demographic crisis of the seventeenth century would also mean, for most of Europe, a long term crisis of industry.⁶³

Brenner elaborates, arguing that it was this agrarian capitalism that enabled England to begin a sustained transition towards industrial capitalism:

What distinguished the English industrial development of the early modern period was its continuous character, its ability to sustain itself and to provide its own self-perpetuating dynamic. Here, once again, the key was to be found in the capitalist structure of agriculture. Agricultural improvement not only made it possible for an ever greater proportion of the population to leave the land to enter industry; equally important, it provided, directly and indirectly, the growing home market which was an essential ingredient in England's continued industrial growth through the entire period of the "general economic crisis of the seventeenth century" in Europe. Thus, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the prosperous class of tenant and yeoman farmers, as well as landlords, appears to have offered significant outlets for English industrial goods. At the same time ... continuing improvements in agricultural productivity combined with low food prices to give an extra margin of spending power to significant elements throughout the middle and perhaps even the lower class so as to expand the home market and fuel the steady growth of industry into the period of the industrial revolution. English economic development thus depended upon a nearly unique symbiotic relationship between agriculture and industry. It was ... an agricultural revolution, based on the emergence of capitalist class relations in the countryside

which made it possible for England to become the first nation to experience industrialization.⁶⁴

Until the point at which industry began to assert an independent dynamism of its own, England was dominated politically by the class of landlords who had been the chief beneficiaries of agrarian capitalism. Between the mid-seventeenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries, England was under the sway of members of the landed gentry, being ruled by what Barrington Moore has called "a committee of landlords".⁶⁵ E.P. Thompson has written that:

The settlement of 1688 inaugurated a hundred years of comparative social status ... The main beneficiaries were those vigorous agrarian capitalists, the gentry ... (who -BM) made up a superbly successful and self-confident capitalist class.⁶⁶

Despite his above-cited admission that the intention of British colonial policy was to create a society of large landed estates to be tilled by tenant farmers paying rent (i.e. a system of agrarian capitalism), Ryerson's inability to recognize the existence of agrarian capitalism in England necessarily made him incapable of recognizing the efforts of the colonial power to recreate that form of society in Upper Canada. He was persistent in his equation of large-scale landownership with feudalism; the only thing that prevented him from consistently and straightforwardly categorizing the social formation in both of the pre-rebellion Canadas as feudal was the presence of merchant capital (and we have already seen the problems Marx

identified in an effort to use merchant capital in the periodisation of history). His theoretical rigidity extends from his utterly uncritical acceptance of the rigid stages theory of Stalinist historiography, in which feudalism is immediately followed by full blown capitalism (i.e. industrial capitalism).

According to Ryerson the first stages of settlement in Upper Canada had created "an almost self-sufficient 'natural economy'," (such an economy often being associated with feudalism in the Stalinist tradition). However, this stage of development quickly gave way to another:

Gradually, as the settlers cleared the land and started farms, the largely self-sufficient family economy gave way to a measure of division of labour, with simple commodity exchange of farm crops for the handiwork of the artisan.⁶⁷

For Ryerson, this second stage of Upper Canadian development was the creation of an embryonic form of industrial capitalism. He explains that it led "to the crystallizing of distinct social classes", and a process of change toward industrial capitalism. In fudging on the nature of the social order existing in pre-rebellion Upper Canada, Ryerson was trying to explain an immediate transition from the "commercialized feudalism" of the 1820s and 1830s to the industrial capitalism of the 1860s. The distinction between the "natural economy", "simple commodity exchange" and industrial capitalist stages of development seems to cover essentially demographic and commercialization types of

explanation. Thus, Ryerson attaches great significance to the size and location of the population, and to the spread of "commodity exchange" spurred primarily by "the activity of colonial merchants".⁶⁸ He fails, however, to place these two partial explanations of development in the context of the class relations existing at the time.

Ryerson believed that the demographic and commercial expansion had created a home market, while expanding the "productive forces", and creating the beginnings of co-operative social production in manufacture. He missed completely the fact that many of those farmers who entered Upper Canada from Britain and the United States were the product of agrarian capitalist societies, where the importance of systematic investment of capital in the improvement of agricultural production was well understood.⁶⁹ In other words, he failed to understand that only by looking to the class structures in those societies from which Upper Canada's immigrants came (especially the United States), was it possible to explain the rapid economic development created through capital investment in agriculture. As Pentland has pointed out, it was the development of a surplus producing agriculture in Upper Canada that accounts for the later industrial expansion of consumer goods industries geared towards a home market.

Ryerson was correct in arguing that early British colonial land policies were directed toward implanting "a society

dominated by large landowners and merchants" in Upper Canada, as a way of checking the progress of the United States.⁷⁰

Since there was a strongly-held, if erroneous, belief among British politicians that the loss of the American colonies had been due in part to the absence of a well entrenched local aristocracy, the Imperial government for a time, supported officially the nurture and maintenance of such elite in British North America. (There -BM) ... large land grants were made to suitable persons in order to build up a gentry class....⁷¹

However, the early efforts of Lord Simcoe and others to re-create Britain's tri-partite class structure of large landowners, capitalist tenants, and agricultural wage labourers in Upper Canada failed. By the 1820s, developments had made it clear that instead of the creation of the conventional 'aristocratic' form of agrarian capitalist class structure, Upper Canada was being largely settled by small and independent freeholders. The availability of land and the related scarcity of labour had made the creation of an agricultural labouring class next to impossible.⁷² The failure of Simcoe's vision in no way dislodged the aristocrats and country gentlemen running the colonial state apparatus from their positions.

The establishment of land taxation and the termination of free land grants during the twenties made it increasingly difficult for working class immigrants to obtain land and prosper. By making land expensive, the local ruling class in Upper Canada hoped to force poor immigrants to remain labourers and thereby

create a pool of cheap wage labour sufficient to attract capital, and sufficient to create an aristocratic agrarian capitalist society dominated by a land owning gentry.⁷³ In this way, the growth of the republican and egalitarian social order of small self-sufficient landowners (characteristic of the United States) would be checked. Not surprisingly, the emerging reform movement in Upper Canada (composed of both bourgeois and petit bourgeois wings) attacked the government on behalf of those immigrants denied access to land by its prohibitive price.⁷⁴

In addition, the shortage of capital for investment in agriculture created difficulties for those Upper Canadian farmers who sought to increase their productivity.⁷⁵ Poor farmers could only accumulate the capital required to boost their productivity through decades of work. As the number of yeomen in Upper Canada increased, and new restrictions were imposed on the availability of land, the political and ideological gap between the yeoman and the colonial ruling class spread. By the 1830s, the Family Compact no longer represented the aspirations of a section of the enterprising capitalist gentry transplanted to the Canadas. It had degenerated into a pre-occupation with speculative land purchasing and the patronage of public office. Agrarian capitalism -- aristocratic style -- failed to take hold in Upper Canada.⁷⁶ Instead of creating a landed capitalist gentry, the granting of large tracts

of land to favoured individuals was the basis for the existence of the Family Compact -- a group Ryerson described in the following terms:

- o The local ruling class of landowners, merchants and officials depend(ent) for their power on toadying to the British colonial administrators, and for their wealth on the toil of the Canadian settlers and Indian trappers.⁷⁷

Despite the failures of the colonial ruling class to create an aristocratic form of agrarian capitalism in Upper Canada, they still had a monopoly of land, which Ryerson correctly identified as a block to capitalist development.⁷⁸ They remained committed to preserving the colonial status upon which their respective power and privilege was based.

As in his earlier analysis of Lower Canada, Ryerson placed great emphasis upon the indigenous development of industry in the period before the rebellion. He noted the growth of a working class throughout the 1820s and 1830s, as dispossessed farmers and unemployed proletarians entered the Canadas.⁷⁹ Some of them obtained land, while others

joined the ranks of the class of wage workers that was just beginning to take shape. Labourers employed on canal building; loggers and sawmill workers; building and metal trades and shipyard workers; mariners, waggoners, service trades -- such were the first recruits to the working class.⁸⁰

He also discussed the manufactures existing in the 1830s, the industry which was supposed to correspond to the existence of the industrial bourgeoisie that justified calling the rebellion

a "bourgeois democratic revolution". In presenting his evidence regarding the level of industry in Upper Canada, Ryerson is less grandiose in his claims than he had been regarding Lower Canada.

During the quarter century after the War of 1812 small-scale production was the rule, with few exceptions. The watermill, which had been in use since the early middle ages, was typical of this level of production; the petty industry based upon it was of necessity rural, ... grist mills and sawmills were among the first and most widespread small enterprises.⁸¹

Ryerson also listed the variety of other enterprises: tanneries, breweries, flour mills, woollen factories, iron foundries, paper mills, pottery works, and so on. He correctly identified these enterprises as indicating that Canadian industry was in the manufactory stage at the time of the rebellion.

Nevertheless, the decades leading up to the rebellion witnessed a number of attempts to get industry going on a modern footing: endeavours that reflect the coming into being and early strivings of a small native industrial bourgeoisie.⁸²

After describing some of these early industrial capitalist experiments, Ryerson ties the leader of the petit bourgeois wing of the reform movement -- Mackenzie -- to the vanguard of the industrial bourgeoisie with the comment that "Mackenzie not only advocated industrialization with his pen; in 1825 he participated in efforts to found a paper manufactory near York."⁸³

In fact, however, there is ample evidence that Mackenzie is better understood as an advocate of a specifically petit bourgeois

form of agrarian capitalism (discussed below), rather than a supporter of industrial capitalism, or of the aristocratic agrarian capitalism formerly envisaged by the colonial ruling class. Thus, in a famous passage written while touring Scotland during 1833, Mackenzie wrote:

It is a melancholy fact, that in proportion as a nation becomes very rich and very full of people, with the wealth produced by its industry placed in the hands of a few, the very poor become more and more wretched.... The farm servant works for a miserable pittance.... The weaver or other mechanic toils in hopeless poverty and neglect, and all the professions dependent on the working classes become equally precarious.... The Scotch and Irish absentee peers and landed gentleman screw the last shilling out of their miserable tenantry, leaving the poor to die.... The number of mills for spinning flax into yarn in Dundee is now very numerous ... and many a poor and miserable boy and girl eke out a miserable existence by long and incessant toil in these ever to be detested establishments, the graves of morality, and the parents of vice, deformity, pauperism, and crime. Long may Canada be free of all such pests! Let our domestic manufactures be those which our children can easily carry on under the eyes and in the houses and homes of their fathers and mothers.²⁴

This is hardly a passage written by an ardent supporter of industrial capitalism, despite Ryerson's insinuations.

On the other hand, neither was Mackenzie an uncompromising supporter of the working class. It is of considerable interest that in discussing the early forms of working class organization in Upper Canada, Ryerson describes the formation of the typographical union in York during the 1830s, while neglecting any mention of Mackenzie's anti-union stance as an employer of some of the printers involved.²⁵ Armstrong has written:

Mackenzie wrote much about the rights and dignity of labour; ... in fact in some political circles he is taken as a precursor of the more radical late nineteenth and twentieth century socialists. Thus the popular picture of Mackenzie ... is one of a leader who would immediately spring forward to defend labour.... Yet when the union was formed it was the King's printer, Stanton, who first recognized it and Mackenzie was the one who attacked the printers most vehemently when they struck.... Mackenzie was no more ready to see the labourers combine to enforce their rights than he was to uphold the monopoly of the Family Compact. His reaction to the strike provides a case history of a capitalist with labour problems, not that of a reformer leading the working man on to new rights. 86

But Ryerson failed to portray this side of Mackenzie, the leader of the "bourgeois democratic revolution" in Upper Canada. The Popular Front interpretation of the rebellion militated against recognizing the play of class interests within the ranks of the "broad coalition" on the reform side. Little wonder, then, that Ryerson would write:

The struggle between the conflicting interests of Labour and Capital would in time become dominant in the social life of industrial communities; but in the period we are considering, the eventual possibility and particular form of an industrial capitalist development hinged on the outcome of a series of struggles around such issues as those of colonial independence, freedom of trade, the attainment of a "market democracy". 87

When the class struggle between small capital and labour could be shown to be dividing the radical reform movement, Ryerson preferred to ignore it as being irrelevant to the successful prosecution of the "bourgeois democratic" struggle for national independence. The parallels with the Communist strategy after 1935 should be all too evident.

In nineteenth century Britain, agrarian capitalism slowly lost ground to industrial capitalism, as the industrial bourgeoisie was incorporated into the old ruling class. In Upper Canada, however, the vision of an aristocratic version of agrarian capitalism died hard, under the pressures of a yeomanry dedicated to their own vision of agrarian capitalism -- a petit bourgeois version. This reform vision of society was predicated on the small independent producer -- the farmer, craftsman, or merchant -- whose labour was seen to be the source of all wealth. Mackenzie and other reformers viewed the Family Compact as unproductive parasites, and opposed their efforts to create a large and landless working class to complement a landowning aristocracy (or even an industrial capitalist class). Large capital -- be it agrarian or industrial -- threatened the fabric of a petit bourgeois society by undermining the independence of the small producers with "unnatural competition". Gates has written that:

Mackenzie ... was as much -- or even more -- concerned over the developing economy of Upper Canada as over its political institutions. In his opinion the real wealth of the country was being created by the labour of the settlers and he wanted to safeguard it for them.... On more than one occasion Mackenzie stated bluntly: "labour is the source of all wealth".... His ideal society was one which secured for every man the greatest possible quantity of the product of his own labour, and denied existence to any privileged political, religious, or economic interests, who might steal it from him. Mackenzie's guiding idea was that the province should be a

community of simple living, hard working, frugal, independent farmers, served by honest merchants, craftsmen, small manufacturers, township schools, an honest legislature, and a free press; in short an educated and largely agrarian democracy. 20

In his assessment of Mackenzie's social philosophy, Rasporich emphasizes his agrarian conservatism, and his conviction that agriculture was the basis of a healthy and natural economy, rather than the industrial capitalism that was the dynamic force in nineteenth century Britain. Along with his defence of agrarian capitalism over industrial capitalism went a tendency

to blur class lines by lumping commoners together whether they were farmers, labourers, or paupers; and aristocrats whether they were bureaucrats, rich merchants, or titled nobility. Ignoring in this way the potential tensions that could develop ... he papered over great cracks in the popular cause. It was evident that he himself favoured the farmer over the mechanic, and was only a fair weather friend of trade unionism. 20

In the context of an understanding of ~~the~~ genuine class interests and motivations of Mackenzie, it is interesting to see how Ryerson deals with the split between Mackenzie the radical and the right wing of the reform movement headed by men like Baldwin. He describes the split between the radicals and the moderates as follows:

As against the radical democrats, headed by Mackenzie ... the representatives of the local bourgeoisie were wavering. When the time of testing should come, they would go over to the side of the oligarchy. For the business elements,

a "deal" with the compact and the Colonial office, such as would allow them some share in political power while maintaining the colonial status, was decidedly preferable to the prospect of a revolutionary struggle.⁹¹

Yet in concluding his discussion, Ryerson does not pose the split in terms of Mackenzie versus the industrial capitalist wing of the reform movement, but as "the betrayal of the revolution -- by the right wing of the colonial bourgeoisie"⁹² (making Mackenzie and company the representatives of the left wing of the colonial bourgeoisie, by implication).

By contrast, Leo Johnson argues that there were genuine class differences between the two wings of the reform movement, with the bourgeois section not sharing Mackenzie's antipathy to the development of industrial capitalism. Johnson writes:

There were ... many reformers in Upper Canada who, while they were opposed to ... aristocratic Toryism, did not reject the development of capitalism as it had appeared in England and Europe. Around the banks, land companies, large merchants and the developing manufacturing establishments began to appear a new class of men ... these rising capitalists entirely rejected Mackenzie's vision of a society of egalitarian producers. (For that reason -BM) ... Mackenzie's growing fears of capitalism ... were not shared by many of his erstwhile allies. (The -BM) ... rising businessmen-reformers ... might support Mackenzie in his attacks upon the entrenched power of Tory authority, (but -BM) they were far from agreeing with him when he attacked the large expenditure of public funds and provincial debt which were intended to aid the province's businessmen.⁹³

Johnson summarizes the difficulties for the petit bourgeois reform movement which found itself caught between the

rising capitalist class and the colonial-landowning Family

Compact:

When Mackenzie ... entered the struggle to bring about his society of equal, independent producers, he and his associates found themselves caught between two contradictory forces: on the one hand, there were the Tories who fought to prevent the rise of the lower classes to independence; on the other, there was the new aggressive class of bankers, great merchants, industrialists -- in Mackenzie's words, the "capitalists" -- who were equally opposed to the Tory aristocracy, but whose every triumph threatened the ultimate degradation of the independent producers into wage slavery ... Unfortunately for Mackenzie ... the attempt to fight on both flanks at the same time so confused the issues that to most viewers the attacks on one side, then the other, began to appear both random and intemperate.. This problem would ultimately destroy public confidence in Mackenzie's leadership and doom the revolt of 1837. 94

The failure of the rebellion smashed the leadership of the petit bourgeois reform movement, clearing the way for the more moderate capitalist reformers to step into the vacuum created when the Tories were swept aside during the next decade.⁹⁵ The Family Compact lost control of the colony, as the final stages of the transition from agrarian to industrial capitalism occurred in Britain, and Mackenzie's society of independent producers gradually gave way to a new form of society based on capital and labour.

Before examining Ryerson's concluding statements on the causes of the defeat of the rebellions, we should return for a moment to the class nature of the Patriotes in Upper Canada. If

my assessment of the nature of the class forces in operation within Upper Canada is correct, then a similar approach may be applied to the movement in Lower Canada. Thus, the class of mainly French speaking professionals that developed during the early decades of the nineteenth century may be understood, following Ouellet, to be a rural based petite bourgeoisie "deeply imbued with the values of their overwhelmingly rural society". These doctors, lawyers and notaries degraded commerce while emphasizing the importance of agriculture. They saw

a menace to the very survival of the French-Canadian society loom(ing) in the image of an arrogant English bourgeoisie which thought of the development of the country in terms of capitalist economic expansion, revolutionized transportation, massive immigration, and institutional reforms. Capitalism, for the French Canadian professional class, symbolized a society dominated by a small group of wealthy individuals, who were English, and nourished by a rural and urban proletariat, which was French. 06

These middle class professionals believed the vocation of the French Canadian nation to be an agricultural one.⁹⁷ However, they also believed that the political dominance of the English merchants was the major barrier to the fulfillment of that vocation.

The reaction of the professional men to the capitalists' program was also that of individual men who ... remained bound up with the rural world, its values, and its mental structures, and who still shared its fears and inhibitions. That is why they were conscious of struggling against men who as "enemies of the country's prosperity, have not ceased to want to substitute the interests

of a narrow and ruinous commerce for agricultural interests which alone can ensure the happiness of the colony". 98

The belief that the French Canadian nation was first and foremost an agricultural one, corresponded to their class position as a strata "of people who indirectly collected land rent from the rural population". 99 This preoccupation with agriculture as the basis of society mixed with a North American political liberalism to yield a program intended to create equality of condition through the spread of small peasant ownership of land through the seigneurial system.

In his writings on Papineau, Ouellet stresses that the leader of the Patriotes "always placed the agricultural community in opposition to the trading community". 100 Papineau combined democracy, a liberal conception of the state, and the idealization of the small peasant proprietor, with a hatred of aristocracy, monarchy and a revulsion against speculation and monopolies.

He dreamt of a French Canadian democratic state founded on a population mainly agricultural this Utopian state could not do without a class of business men. Their function would be to sell Canadian farm products, either in the raw state or converted by numerous small industries, to those limitless markets which free trade would open up. But these new style capitalists, created by the very needs of the agrarian society, would never be given the opportunity of turning into speculators or of reaping profits by a monopoly of the state machinery ... the social equilibrium would rest upon ... seigneurial tenure.... (It -BM) seemed essentially favourable to an equal distribution

of landed property, when the seigneur was conceived of as the guardian of social equality and as an insurmountable obstacle to capitalist speculation. 101

What Ouellet describes here is a Lower Canadian version of the petit bourgeois program of agrarian capitalism advocated by the radicals among the Upper Canadian reform movement. The only difference is that here Papineau injects an element of paternalism into the vision, by virtue of his defence of seigneurial tenure. As Ouellet has described Papineau's conception of a liberated Lower Canada, the liberal professions would act as a counter-weight to the ambitions of the merchants and the seigneurs, the latter group being assigned the role of benevolent father figures over the peasantry:

For him ... the seigneurial regime engendered equality of opportunity, ... because it stipulated equal sharing of property among descendants, and ... because it offered an equal sharing of land among individuals; the seigneur was simply the neutral guardian of the equality of opportunity.

The image of the ideal seigneurie as an instrument of national survival had only one purpose ... to prevent the lower classes from questioning an institution which served the interests of the French Canadian middle classes and, in particular, of the leaders of the parti patriote, that company of starry eyed lovers of landed property, many of whom were seigneurs. 102

Ryerson's energies would have been better spent had he examined the program of patriotes in the context of the agrarian class relations in Lower Canada, rather than as the instruments of rising industrial capitalism.

Our discussion of Unequal Union demonstrates that it, like Ryerson's previous writings, is a product of the Stalinist tradition of Marxism. Despite an apparently renewed emphasis on the importance of human agency, the theoretical framework which underpins Unequal Union was essentially the same as that employed in all Ryerson's previous writings; hence the reliance upon a distributional theory of class, and instrumentalist conception of politics, the base/superstructure model, a technicist conception of production, and so on.

On a substantive level, Unequal Union represents little progress in its interpretation of the 1837-1838 rebellions over that which Ryerson pioneered in 1937. His account is still developed in the context of a Popular Front need to underplay the class differences among the rebels. Moreover, the discussion of the rebellions is cast in the same mould Ryerson had created in the era of the depression: a contradiction between the rising forces of industrial capitalism and the barriers erected by the feudal or feudal-mercantile property engendered by the colonial power. Our discussion illustrated that Ryerson's preoccupation with technical development directed his analysis towards a documentation of the level of technology being employed in industrial production. As a result, Ryerson mistakenly devoted his energies to transforming Mackenzie and Papineau into supporters of industrial capitalist development. The agrarian character of post revolutionary agrarian capitalist

development in England was missed by Ryerson, and not surprisingly he exhibited little appreciation of the agrarian capitalist ideologies at play in 1837-1838.

In summary, Ryerson was no more capable of avoiding the pitfalls of Stalinist theory in 1968 than he had been before 1956. The People's History of Canada is the history of Canadian development told from within the Stalinist tradition. It is, as such, that contemporary Marxists must beware of relying upon it.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER XII

1. see Ryerson's Unequal Union, Progress Books, 1968, pages vii - viii.
2. ibid, pages 20-21
3. ibid, page 22
4. ibid, page 20
5. ibid, pages 22-23
6. ibid, page 429
7. ibid, pages 25-26
8. ibid page 425
9. ibid, page 426
10. ibid
11. ibid, pages 426-7
12. ibid, page 426
13. see Ryerson's "Marxism and the Writing of Canadian History," in NAM, volume 4 #2, 1947, pages 48-49 and "Conflicting Approaches in the Social Sciences," in The Marxist Quarterly, #4, Spring 1962, page 59
14. Unequal Union, page 29.
15. see Ryerson's 1837: The Birth of Canadian Democracy, Francis White, 1937, page 26
16. Unequal Union, the references to the relations of production in the Canadas as "mercantile" can be found, for example, on pages 19 and 428; a reference to "semi-feudal" relations of production is found on page 32, while references to the existence of "feudal" relations of production are found on pages 29, 30 and 428.
17. ibid, page 32
18. ibid, pages 31-2
19. ibid, page 32
20. see the review of Unequal Union by W.G. Ormsby in Histoire Sociale, November 1969
21. see Ryerson's The Founding of Canada, Progress Books, 1960, page 200
22. Unequal Union, page 36

23. ibid, page 37
24. ibid, page 32
25. ibid, pages 93 -4
26. ibid, page 174
27. ibid, page 39
28. see Marx's discussion in Part IV of Capital, Vintage Books, 1977
29. ibid, page 40
30. ibid, pages 40-41
31. see page 123 of the Ormsby review of Unequal Union, op.cit.
32. interview with Norman Penner, Summer 1981
33. see The Founding of Canada, page 327, and Unequal Union, page 453
34. see H Clare Pentland's Labour and Capital in Canada: 1650-1860, Lorimer, 1981, pages 146-7
35. ibid, pages 151 152
36. ibid ChapterV, also see the Introduction by Paul Phillips, pages xxix - xxx
37. Unequal Union, pages 59-60 -
38. see David McNally's paper "Staple Theory as Commodity Fetishism," forthcoming in Studies in Political Economy, #6 Fall 1981, page 27 (of the typed original)
39. Unequal Union, page 42
40. ibid, page 53
41. ibid, page 77
42. ibid, page 82
43. ibid, pages 286-290
44. ibid, page 85
45. The Founding of Canada, page 284
46. Unequal Union, page 89.

47. ibid, page 19
48. see Marx's Capital, volume III, Progress Publishers, 1966, page 325
49. ibid, pages 331-332
50. ibid, pages 334-335
51. see Marx's Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm, International Publishers, 1964, pages 109 -110
52. The Founding of Canada, page 137
53. ibid, page 133
54. ibid
55. ibid, page 134
56. see "Marxism and the English Civil War," by Norah Carlin in International Socialism, #10, Winter 80/81; see also Brian Manning's The English People and the English Revolution, Penguin 1978
57. "Marxism and the English...", Pages 112-113
58. ibid, pages 112-114
59. ibid, page 112
60. The Founding of Canada, page 133
61. see A.L.Morton's A People's History of England, second edition, Lawrence and Wishart, 1951, page 327
62. see Robert Brenner's "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," in Past and Present, #70, 1977, pages 63-66; also useful is David McNally's "Commerce and Civilization: A Critique of the Classical Theory of the Origins of Capitalism," unpublished paper, Toronto, 1979
63. see Brenner's "Agrarian Class Structure...", page 66
64. ibid, pages 67-8
65. see Barrington Moore Jr.'s Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, Beacon Press, 1972, page 19
66. see E.P.Thompson's "The Peculiarities of the English," in The Poverty of Theory, Merlin Press, 1979, pages 43 & 48
67. Unequal Union, pages 94-95

68. ibid, page 95
69. see Pentland's Labour and ..., pages 78-9, and page 89
70. Unequal Union, page 85
71. see "The Family Compact: A Negative Oligarchy," by S F Wise, in The Family Compact: Aristocracy or Oligarchy ?, ed. by David Earl, Copp Clark, 1967, page 143
72. see Leo Johnson's History of the County of Ontario 1615 -1875, Corporation of the County of Ontario, 1973, pages 48-65; also see Land Policies of Upper Canada by Lillian Gates, University of Toronto Press, 1968, pages 66, 25, and 303-4
73. see Johnson, pages 65-68
74. ibid, page 70
75. ibid, page 80, and H Clare Pentland's article "The Role of Capital in Canadian Economic Development before 1875," in the Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, Nov. 1950
76. see "The Compact as an Economic and Social Group," by Robert E. Saunders, in Earl's The Family Compact..., op cit, pages 59 and following
77. Unequal Union, page 92
78. ibid, page 107
79. ibid, pages 95-97
80. ibid, page 102
81. ibid, pages 95-96
82. ibid, page 97
83. ibid, page 98
84. see The Selected Writings of William Lyon Mackenzie, ed. by Margaret Fairley, Oxford, 1960, pages 170-171
85. Unequal Union, page 104
86. see the article by F H Armstrong "The Reformer as Capitalist: William Lyon Mackenzie and the Printers' Strike of 1836," in Ontario History, September 1967, pages 195-6
87. Unequal Union, page 105

88. see Johnson, pages 99-100
89. see "The Decided Policy of William Lyon Mackenzie," by Lillian Gates, Canadian Historical Review, XL, September 1959, pages 187-8
90. see William Lyon Mackenzie, by Anthony W Raspoorich, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972, pages 9, 10 -11
91. Unequal Union, pages 114-5
92. *ibid*, page 131
93. see Johnson, pages 112-113
94. *ibid*, pages 113-114
95. *ibid* page 126
96. see Fernand Ouellet's Lower Canada 1791-1840, McLelland and Stewart, 1980, page 74
97. *ibid*, page 75
98. see Ouellet's Economic and Social History of Quebec 1760-1850, Macmillan, 1981, page 384
99. *ibid*, page 386
100. see Fernand Ouellet's "Louis Joseph Papineau: A Divided Soul," Historical Booklet #11, published by the Canadian Historical Association, page 4
101. *ibid*, pages 11 and 12-13
102. see Ouellet's Lower Canada..., pages 218 and 151

PART IV

CONCLUSION: 1968 AND AFTER

416

CHAPTER XIII

1968 AND AFTER:

THE PARTIAL BREAK WITH STALINIST THEORY

1968 and 1969 were critical years for Stanley Ryerson. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia pointed to the unlikelihood that the process of democratization within the Eastern bloc -- a trend Ryerson had supported -- would proceed any further. The CPC leadership supported the invasion unconditionally, and used the internal debate as an excuse to clamp down on the 'open' attitude which had characterized the Party during the mid-sixties. The uproar about Czechoslovakia followed hot on the heels of a very damaging loss of Party members over the Russification of the Ukraine, and preceded an all important discussion of the Party's position on the Quebec separatist movement. As an intellectual committed to ever greater dialogue with the growing left outside the Party, and as a Communist concerned about democratization in the Eastern bloc and the problem of national oppression, the events of the late sixties prompted Ryerson to withdraw from active Party membership. By 1971 he would resign.

John Kolasky has documented the bitter struggles within the CPC over the issue of the Russification of the Ukraine. From the early sixties, Ukrainian Communists in Canada discovered Soviet programmes to make Russian the dominant language in the Ukraine. As the clamour mounted, the leadership of the Party finally acceded to the demand that an official delegation be sent to the Soviet Union to investigate the charges, and take up the issue with Soviet authorities. Upon their return, the delegation split on whether to strongly condemn the Soviet policies. The published report was a compromise which criticized the Soviet Union in mild terms. But Kolasky, a veteran of thirty years in the Communist Party, published a well documented attack on the Soviet policies, initiating a debate which resulted in many resignations from the Party. As the arguments raged throughout the spring and summer of 1968, Soviet officials pressured Party leaders to withdraw even the mildly critical official Party report. The whole affair provided irrefutable evidence that Soviet Russia was guilty of systematic national oppression of the Ukrainians, and that opposition to Soviet policies would not be tolerated within the CPC.¹

During 1968, reformers in the leadership of the Czech CP began introducing market forces into the economy to promote greater productivity. The mild liberalization which accompanied the measures prompted Czech students and workers to take some of the liberal rhetoric seriously. (Fearful that Dubcek might

be another Tito, the Soviets invaded. The reaction within the international Communist movement was different from that which had followed the invasion of Hungary. In 1956, the cold war isolation of the Western CPs had made it easier for pro-Moscow elements to claim that the bourgeois press had distorted the situation. By 1968 however, most Communist parties -- the Canadian one included -- had come out of the ghetto, and were seeking to develop an image as respectable organizations only loosely connected with Moscow. In addition, the invasion of Czechoslovakia brought to an abrupt end a process of mild and gradual democratization from the top down. In that respect the Czechoslovakian "socialism with a human face" appealed to loyal Party members more so than the working class insurrection of 1956 had.²

For parties in the non-Communist world, the Czech events bit deep. The decision was not simply about a particular country in Eastern Europe.... It was about the whole role of the parties themselves -- whether they were to be Stalinist mouthpieces for Moscow, or social democratic parties.... It is this which explains why Czechoslovakia should have caused a full scale crisis ... (in the world Communist movement -BM). In general, support for the Russian line was an indication of particular dependence on Russian aid ... or of the fact that the parties had no real base at home, and would have lost their whole reason for living if they had cut out the umbilical cord to Moscow.³

Throughout the spring and summer of 1968, a prominent Canadian Communist stationed in Prague sent enthusiastic articles about the Czech reforms to the CPC newspaper -- the Canadian Tribune. The dispatches:

described the broad program of democratization, the spontaneous outburst of popular enthusiasm for the new course, the wide participation in free and open discussion, and the high hopes for "a greater degree of democracy ... that in one form or another will have to take place in every socialist country". The articles received great publicity in the paper and were instrumental in developing a deep sympathy among Communists in Canada ... for the Dubcek experiment ... (some -BM) Communist leaders were convinced ... that the events in Czechoslovakia heralded the beginning of a process of reform that would engulf the whole Soviet bloc and add political democracy to economic security.⁴

Among the leading members of the CPC who supported the democratization process in Czechoslovakia was Stanley Ryerson. Following the August 1968 invasion by the Soviet Union, Ryerson and other executive committee opponents of the Soviet action published an official Party statement which criticized the Russians. (Ryerson et al had managed to get their statement approved only because a majority of the executive committee's hard liners were travelling abroad or on vacation.)

The issue of Horizons published immediately following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia contained official pronouncements from the CPC regarding the event. The statement, which Ryerson had helped draft, was critical of the invasion stating that it stemmed:

not only (from the -BM) intrigues of enemies of socialism, but -- facilitating these -- the presence of unresolved problems of socialist development and socialist democracy, efforts to deal with which we warmly greeted in the decision of our April 1968 Central Committee meeting.

The statement added that the CPC strongly urged

- the early withdrawal of all foreign troops from Czechoslovakia, the upholding of her sovereignty and independence, pursuit of the policy of deepening and extending socialist democracy embarked upon by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in its decisions of January 1968.

The CPC statement further added that it was "deeply disturbed" by the discrepancy between the Warsaw Pact's account of the situation, and that of "leading bodies in Czechoslovakia".⁵

Predictably, this statement drew the ire of hard line Moscow supporters, who retaliated by circumventing Ryerson's position as Editor of Horizons, and included two statements supporting the invasion from other Communist Parties. The major showdown between the two sides took place at a meeting of the Central Committee meeting held in October. The CPC's General Secretary -- William Kashtan -- defended the invasion as the only appropriate response to the tactics of the imperialist West, "the systematic efforts aimed at undermining the socialist countries from within". Kashtan's resolution on the situation carried the day, as Kealey explains:

The Kashtan resolution was adopted by a vote of 28-14 with the opposition coming most vociferously from John Boyd and Stanley Ryerson. Although admitting that the whole central committee should have been consulted before the August CPC statement, Ryerson nevertheless refused to back down from its contents which he had helped draft. Instead, he attacked the addition of the GDR and CPUSA materials (i.e. two statements from the Communist Parties in the German Democratic Republic and the United

States regarding the invasion of Czechoslovakia -BM) to Horizons, done apparently with no consultation with the editor. Worrying that "the suppression of facts" might "be the pattern for pre-convention discussion", he denied the claim that the majority of the Czech praesidium had requested the Soviet intervention, noting that this too was a basic question of "communist honesty". Finally, he criticized the invasion as a "high-handed paternalism that hinders socialism", and asked rhetorically if the correct answer to 2,000 words was 7,000 tanks? In closing he indicated that he felt the programme and principles of the CPC were at stake in this debate. 6

But the disagreement over the Soviet invasion, and the actions of the dissident members of the Central Executive Committee (i.e. Ryerson et al) provoked the embattled pro-Moscow faction to tighten Party discipline. In his Central Committee resolution Kashtan also advocated a change in the work of the CPC, such that the number one priority in Party activity become "the strengthening of our class approach ... putting the working class at the head of all priorities and relating all our work to this central task".⁷ Among other things, this new emphasis in the Party would entail:

a decided strengthening of the ideological work of the party. In the past period of time there has been a serious neglect of this side of the Party's work and we are paying a price for it. This brought home by the complex events in Czechoslovakia which caught a number of good comrades off guard and off base. These comrades failed to grasp the new tactics of imperialism in its struggle against socialism and did not see the essence of the question involved in these events, the threat of the socialist gains, the political power of the working class and the leading role of the Party

... which necessitated action by the Warsaw Treaty countries in defence of socialism and peace....

The roots of this confusion and differences of views arose from serious weaknesses in the ideological work of the party in the recent period.⁸

This was only the opening salvo in offensive which the Party hard liners would lead until the convention the following year. The emphasis placed on "ideological confusion" is significant, because it signalled that the Party leadership would attack Ryerson and the others on issues other than the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

In the months after the Central Committee meeting it became apparent that Ryerson and like-minded Party members were being tarred with the brush of "revisionism". The Draft Resolution prepared by the CPC's executive for debate before the Spring convention explained that:

after the struggle against revisionist currents in the 1967-1957 period... inadequate attention was paid to revisionist and right opportunist tendencies which were a direct reflection of bourgeois ideology.... The events in Czechoslovakia signalled the danger of revisionism. Concretely, it reflected a tendency to underestimate and minimize the sharpness of the world-wide confrontation between socialism and imperialism; to over-emphasize national factors while downgrading proletarian internationalism and weakening the role of a Marxist-Leninist Party.⁹

In essence, this represented a call for more attention to the views of Moscow and a greater emphasis on the CPC's responsibility to concentrate on defending the Soviet Union. Predictably, as the Party tightened discipline, Ryerson began to voice his

differences on a variety of other questions besides the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Those disagreements with the Party are summarized in his contribution to the pre-convention discussion in 1969. In a document called "For Broader Approaches", he outlined several areas in which he disagreed with the policies of the CPC, including: the national question, the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and strategy toward the non-Party left. Regardless of these differences, Ryerson had not broken with the CP's essential political strategy. He continued to advocate "a national-democratic alliance of forces opposing monopoly and imperialism and led by labour" as the path toward socialism. He differed only in believing that to build such a movement, the CPC would have to undergo "a renovation and revitalization ... not only in organization and leadership ... but in thinking and approach".

This is vital, both as regards our focus on industry and youth and in relation to the new movements for radical reform, their significance for the labour movement, their relation to the over-all revolutionary process and emerging socialist consciousness.¹⁰

Ryerson demonstrated his sensitivity to the development of the growing new left by pointing out that the "struggles for national independence" were the motivating force. Naturally, he saw the burgeoning anti-imperialist movement reflected in "the fight for a sovereign Quebec and resistance to the US imperialist take-over of Canada".

- One of Ryerson's major disagreements with Party policy stemmed from the CPC position on Quebec. By 1969, Ryerson believed that the existing constitutional framework would not "allow of the working out of a new, voluntary Confederal pact of the two nations on a footing of real equality".

What Marx once visualized for Ireland -- separation "although after separation there may come federation" ... may well be what must happen here: that the only basis on which la Nation Quebecoise will be able to secure and freely exercise the right of national self-determination will be as an independent, sovereign state. In any event, the Communists of English speaking Canada cannot but strengthen their stand in support of Quebec's right to independence. Our advocacy of a "new confederal pact" will then stand as a projected possible (and desirable) sequel to independence, not as a substitute for sovereignty. French Canadian Communists, while emphasizing (as they must) unity in action with Anglo-Canadian working class and democratic forces, will have less inhibition about aligning themselves with the independentists, souverainiste forces in the fight to give a strong anti US imperialist, anti monopoly direction to the national and labour movements in Quebec. (The "unpopularity" of such a stand in English Canada is no justification for advancing the sophistry that a "class" position requires that we oppose Quebec sovereignty, and that we align ourselves with the Anglo-Canadian bourgeoisie and its French Canadian bourgeois and clerical collaborators against the anti-imperialist demand for equality and independence of Quebec!))11

During the 20th Convention, the CPC decisively rejected the separatist movement as a vehicle for carrying forward the struggle in Quebec, and Ryerson's position was attacked by Party leaders. Ryerson had gone public with his strong sympathies

for the separatist movement two years earlier, when he expressed the belief that the prospects for socialism in Quebec were much brighter than in English Canada.¹² Ryerson thought he could see greater prospects in Quebec for the kind of "national democratic alliance of forces opposing monopoly and imperialism" which he and the CP advocated.

Throughout the decade of the sixties, Ryerson had taken intellectual work more seriously than ever before, publishing three books in nine years. His openness to new intellectual currents convinced him the CPC must relate to the independent and new left if it was to recapture some of its previous vitality.

More time, attention and energy needs to be put into seeking out ways whereby we can influence more effectively than we have so far, the emergence of possible intermediate forms of political (and electoral) expression on the left.¹³

In Ryerson's view, the Party needed to open itself up to the new intellectual and political currents of the late sixties, a strategy the Party leadership was unlikely to adopt given its defensiveness after the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Ryerson wrote:

A much needed turn outward is not helped by an approach that appears to argue for defensively turning inward. Persisting sectarian negativism, dogmatic disquiet about "the threat of spontaneity" (!) can only severely hamper our effort to relate in relevant ways to new phenomena.... Moreover, shutting ourselves in a smug sectarian-negativism lessens (if it does not wholly extinguish) our chances of influencing ideologically, through exchanges of views and debate, the participants in ... opposition currents.¹⁴

Ryerson noted a "closer interweaving of anti-imperialist and socialist issues" which made possible "the opening up of discussions with radicals over the relation of immediate demands to socialist revolution". The connection between socialism and anti-imperialism was rooted in the global crisis of imperialism (i.e. the weakening of the US) and "the onset of the scientific-technological revolution". "Cybernetics and automation contain within themselves the logic of a growing demand for workers' control, pointing to structural change and raising the question of socialist solutions".¹⁵

Once again, Ryerson was resorting to the idea that the technological development of the material process of production necessitated new social relations. For the first time, the expression "works' control" appears in his writings, indicating some measure of his conviction that "democratization" was the pressing problem for the 'socialist' world. Ryerson advocated "pluralism in socialist society" as the logic of the position adopted by the CPSU at their 20th Congress in 1956.

For those who tend to view that Congress (and the de-Stalinization process it set in train) as an exercise in "revisionism", there can be no thought of new openings on the left, or new approaches to be worked out to such major questions as democracy's relation to socialism in the setting of the scientific technological revolution. Yet these are in fact the questions that have elbowed their way to the fore in the socialist world itself: as in the reform of economic management and planning, questions of democratization and re-vitalizing of the soviets and the trade unions, of art and science under socialism. In the

process, there is a healthy pressure to overcome the authoritarian cast of mind that tends ... to see socialist democracy, not as an organic class imperative of the workers, but as some sort of "concession" grudgingly conceded to "others"; a standpoint that views centralism as something essentially proletarian, but democracy as somehow petty bourgeois ... whence bureaucratic centralism. It was this that was called in question in January 1968 in Czechoslovakia -- and snuffed out (or almost) in August.¹⁶

Here Ryerson makes his sympathies for the Czech experiment explicit. The de-Stalinization program of Khrushchev had made possible a new attitude towards democracy, which the new scientific-technological revolution was not making necessary. Ryerson could identify with the efforts of the Czech bureaucracy to increase productivity by instituting liberal reform.

Ryerson recalled that he had discussed in detail, in Open Society, "the extraordinarily difficult issue of the relation between tension of class antagonism on a world scale, and the imperatives of socialist democratization".¹⁷ He conceded that the events in Czechoslovakia posed a potential threat from Western imperialism through "counter-revolution". But he maintained that it was incorrect to view the situation exclusively in terms of the danger of "capitalist encirclement". There was a second component to the crisis in Czechoslovakia:

the problems of a newly maturing socialist economy and the political-democratic forms corresponding to it. The tensions here derive from a contradiction between authoritarian structures and the requirements of the new technology, cybernation, and the higher educational

levels and degree of participation "from below" that the scientific revolution makes mandatory.... In one way or another this problem has impelled adoption of new approaches to socialist management, planning, choices, in all the main European socialist countries. It is the political corollaries that are faced up to with difficulty, however. The "de-Stalinization" initiated by the CPSU 20th Congress was an historic part of that process; but strong pressures for "re-Stalinization" have intermittently asserted themselves.¹⁸

Again, Ryerson justifies his demand for greater democracy, not on the basis of some new conception of socialism or a re-conceptualization of human production. The need for democracy is a product of the new productive forces of the recent scientific-technological revolution.

Ryerson contrasted the authoritarianism and the "pressures for re-Stalinization" in the Eastern bloc with both the reformers in Czechoslovakia, and with the independent strategies being developed in the Spanish and Italian Communist Parties (the originators of 'Eurocommunism'). He quoted with approval documents from both parties which stressed the need for "the conception of political pluralism in the march to socialism" as "the precondition for a pluralist socialist society, rich in democratic diversification: not a centralizing, bureaucracy-ridden society identified with one party power".¹⁹ Ryerson thus revealed himself to be an adherent of the emerging phenomenon of Eurocommunism, and someone who believed the CPC must assert its independence from Moscow with greater force.

The pro-Moscow faction of the leadership responded to Ryerson with an article in the convention discussion bulletin written by Sam Walsh: "Three Points of Difference with Comrade Stanley Ryerson". Writing from the Quebec wing of the Party, Walsh criticized Ryerson for advocating an approach to political work based on "ideological debate and dialogue coupled with (consent by silence) on their tactics" towards both Quebec separatists and student radicals.

I draw from Comrade Ryerson's approach that criticism of the tactics of both the "activist" leaders of the student movement and of the independentistes constitutes treating them as representing the main enemy, and stands in the way of developing the alliance (required -BM) But does this not condemn the Party to accept that it has no real vanguard role to play...?20

Walsh maintained that many of the student radicals were petty bourgeois, and constituted an "elite, the super-revolutionaries (who -BM) take matters into their own hands ... forcing the students and staff to support them or become "scabs", bourgeois, conservatives or reactionary communists". Similarly, Walsh rejected the idea that the Party should align itself "with the radical, potentially or already anti-imperialist petty bourgeoisie" represented by the Parti Quebecois. Instead, Walsh -- speaking for the majority in the CPC leadership -- suggested that the only way the CPC could "become a force again in our own right and regain the strength to play a significant, even decisive part in bringing together the national, democratic alliance

against monopoly capitalism" was to both cooperate and compete with the students and the independentists. Ryerson's uncritical attitude toward these groups would "snuff out whatever independent influence" the CPC had been able to gain, if adopted.²¹

Having made his case against Ryerson on the questions of Quebec and the student movement, Walsh then turned his attack towards Ryerson's assessment of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Speaking for the pro-Moscow majority in the Party he rejected Ryerson's concerns on the grounds that the process of democratization in the Eastern bloc had "uncovered latent anti-socialist attitudes" which were being promoted and exploited by the West, and which endangered the Warsaw pact. Walsh dismissed the complaints of Ryerson and the other Communist opponents of the invasion:

The criticisms of our own comrades were due, in my opinion, to a lack of confidence in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, often coupled with a long-developing similar lack of confidence in the working class and in the Communist Party of our own country. Hence their heavy leaning on the "intellectuals" as the carriers of the idea of a "new kind" of socialism....²²

Walsh generalized his argument about the "lack of confidence" among some members of the Party by sounding an anti-intellectual note:

Our problem has been that we have been too "contemplative", both of events and ourselves. A number of leading comrades have been expressing their frustration. I think it represents a loss of confidence in the working class and in the Party....²³

The anti-intellectualism being pushed by the Party leadership also struck a chord elsewhere. In a contribution to the pre-convention discussion bulletin, a Hamilton member of the Party wrote an attack on Ryerson entitled "Get out of the Ivory Tower". It read in part:

What is dogmatic, sectarian and actually shows a fear and dislike of workers ... is the attitude that class power exercised by the proletariat will stifle the artists, intellectuals and scientists. To me this is the attitude of intellectuals that have gotten very fond of their preferred position by merit of brain work versus industrial work in a bourgeois society.... Communist workers in our party have experienced more sectarianism and dogmatism than anyone else at the hands of Communist pseudo-intellectuals who because they have lost contact with the working class environment don't think it exists any longer.²⁴

By the time of the April 1969 convention the defeat of the dissidents within the Party's leadership was imminent. The debate within the Party had spurred the pro-Moscow faction to clamp down on those sections of the Party perceived to be strongholds of the intellectuals.²⁵ One victim of these moves was the theoretical journal which Ryerson had edited since the early sixties, Horizons. It was to be replaced by a new publication oriented toward Party policy rather than theoretical research. In his last editorial, Ryerson defended the accomplishments of the old publication, in attracting non-Party intellectuals to the periphery of the Party, in acting as a catalyst in the development of the Marxist centres in Toronto and Montreal, and

in presenting original research on questions of economics, politics, philosophy and culture. There was a slight tone of bitterness in Ryerson's explanation of the change: there had been a contradiction between the efforts "to achieve a focus on long range studies, in depth, of fundamental questions ... and the evident need felt by the Party ... for up to date political commentary and guidance on current happenings."²⁶

In a detailed report on the 1969 Communist party convention, the Toronto Telegram explained that the purge of opponents to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia had

removed virtually all the liberal, or moderate elements from the ruling central committee and turned the clock back to hardline Stalinist times.... It indicates the Canadian party's reaffirmation of obedience to the Moscow line, and reflects a general tightening up of the ideology. For the past couple of years there has been a steady return to Stalinist methods in the USSR and a growing intolerance to liberal or moderate tendencies that began under Krushchev. ²⁷

At least ten top Party members either resigned or were removed from the CPC's central committee; one of them was Ryerson.

The "purged" central committee members ... feel that the Party is missing the boat on youth, that it hasn't the appeal it should have. They disagree on tactics, if not on overall party strategy. ²⁸

Unlike 1956, the dissidents within the leadership of the Party made little effort to capture control of the Party.²⁹

Ryerson's growing differences with the CPC were serious enough that they might have impelled him to undertake a faction

fight in favour of his views. But he was probably well aware that such an effort would be futile. Instead he went on a leave of absence from active party work, and assumed a teaching post at the University of Quebec at Montreal. In March of 1971 the Canadian Tribune published a short statement with the headline "S.B. Ryerson not CP Member". It said:

Stanley Ryerson recently advised the central executive committee of the Communist Party that he had decided to withdraw from the Party. This decision arises from the fact that he continues to maintain the different views he held prior to the 20th convention and which the 20th convention declared to be erroneous. Stanley Ryerson asked for time to think out his differences. This was agreed to. However, his views have not changed.

The central executive committee now declares that S.B. Ryerson is no longer a member of the Communist Party of Canada. 30

The debate over the invasion had forced the Party leadership to decide between re-affirmation of its total loyalty to the Soviet Union (and therefore a crack-down on those revisionist elements who were being publicly critical of the socialist motherland), or a strategy of disassociating itself from the Soviet Union in a manner similar to the "Eurocommunist" Parties. Since the small and declining forces of the Party made the latter strategy an unlikely road to political growth -- given the much larger NDP -- Canadian Communists fell back upon their only strong point, the connection with the Soviet Union.

Some of the Communist leaders who had taken the "liberalization" strategy of the sixties seriously proved

incapable of making the turn back to being merely the local cheerleaders for the Soviet Union. But, their efforts to disassociate themselves from the excesses of Russian policy (for example in Czechoslovakia) did not necessarily push them to search for the fundamental causes of those difficulties. Such was the case with Ryerson. His resignation from the Communist Party should not be mistaken for an abandoning of the theoretical views he had developed during his almost forty years as a Communist. His disagreements with the CP were partially tactical (with respect to Quebecois nationalism and the need for a greater orientation to the new left) and flowed from a desire to effect a genuine "social democratic" transformation of Canadian society, rather than remain in limbo in an increasingly marginal leftish sect, distinguished only by its link with the Soviet Union. His growing commitment to the defence of "bourgeois democratic liberties" throughout the sixties was the natural outcome of his own political and intellectual de-Stalinization. Ryerson had taken seriously the idea that the Communist parties could be fundamentally reformed. With the removal of Krushchev, the national-chauvinism of the Soviets in the Ukraine, the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and the CPC's uncritical adherence to the Moscow line, it was apparent that the de-Stalinization experiment was over. Yet, there was nothing in these issues -- or, for that matter, in his growing political and intellectual connection with

the independentiste and student movements in Quebec -- which compelled Ryerson to re-examine the very premises of Marxism. His writings after 1971 give us little evidence that Ryerson considered his differences with the CP great enough to challenge his most basic theoretical assumptions.

Some five years after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, in a 1973 book review, Ryerson admitted that his opinion on the alleged demise of the American Communist Party "must seem aggravatingly clouded and unsure: the reflex of my own uncompleted process of examen de conscience". He added that American Communists (and implicitly, Canadian Communists) had been guilty of

a persistent tendency to apply the experience of other Communist parties and the science of Marxism in a mechanical and doctrinaire fashion (Communist Party members had -BM) a tacitly institutionalized intellectual, political independence on what was seen as a world revolutionary movement whose historic centre of gravity resided outside the country.... 31

This critical but rather cryptic judgement on the Russian connection under Stalin as a debilitating one is described but not explained. His examination of conscience had not extended far enough to put his criticism on a solid theoretical basis. It certainly had not penetrated to the core of the Stalinist world view. The American CP, says Ryerson, was characterized by:

a more or less subtly rationalized dependence on the exigencies of manoeuvre of the "leading party of the international movement" (which -BM) excluded autonomous judgement or decision. (What

had been called -BM) a kind of "mental Comintern" continued to be operative long after that body's official dissolution in 1943.... 32

Despite this comment, Ryerson still had nothing to say about how the "mental Comintern" under Stalin had shaped the Communist understanding of Marxism.

In another vein, Ryerson shed some light on his own experience in the CPC with the claim that "the mental and emotional disarray" caused by "the ideological earthquake of 'de-Stalinization'" was surpassed by subsequent events"

"Worse was to come, but this study closes before the surfacing of the Sino-Soviet split, and the throwing into reverse of the processes that the 20th Congress had seemed to inaugurate". 33.

For Ryerson, the problem posed by the debilitating character of the Russian connection "remains unresolved. Certainly, attempts to come to grips with it are not wanting; but an effective, compelling answer has not been found". Both the book and Ryerson's own experience as a leading Communist left him with "one ... nagging question":

How much of which was valid in the challenge of the Communists to the Big Business order in America (or in Canada, for that matter -BM) is still relevant and at work in today's radical ferment? 34

By 1973, Ryerson had still not moved beyond criticising Stalinism to identifying how Stalin's twenty-five year domination of international Communism had recast Marxist theory in a technicist mold. In the years after 1971, Ryerson has become a vocal critic³⁶ of the Communist movement, while remaining a "Marxist." What his "Marxism" now consists of is not clear, since it has neither been systematically presented, nor given any organizational form. Even a cursory examination of his writings in the decade since 1971 suggests that Ryerson's "process of examen de conscience" has not extended to anything like a systematic re-appraisal of the materialist conception of history -- or even his own writings --³⁷ in light of a Marxist analysis of the phenomenon of Stalinism.

Despite his critical stance towards Stalinism and the regime which it produced, his criticisms have remained superficial and unscientific -- perhaps the legacy of so many years service in the Stalinist distortion of Marxism.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER XIII

1. see Ivan Avakumovic's The Communist Party in Canada, McLelland and Stewart, 1975, pp 160-177 and pp 264-5
2. see Ian Birchall's Workers Against the Monolith, Pluto Press, 1974, pp 152-154
3. *ibid*, pp 154-155
4. see John Kolasky's The Secret Illusion, PMA books, 1980, page 173
5. see Horizons, #27, Fall, 1968, pp 11-12
6. see Kealey's unpublished paper "Stanley Breuhart Ryerson: Canadian Revolutionary Intellectual", presented to the annual meetings of the Canadian Political Science Association, May 1981, page 13
7. see the resolution by William Kashtan, "The Economic and Political Situation and Tasks of the Party", written for the Central Committee meeting of October 4-7, 1968, Park Papers, Public Archives of Canada, Volume 11, File 196, page 19
8. *ibid*, page 22
9. see Convention 69, "Discussion Bulletin of the Communist Party of Canada in Preparation for the 20th Convention", #1, January 1969, page 11
10. see Ryerson's "For the Broader Approaches", in Convention 69, #2, February 1969, page 18
11. *ibid*, pp 18-19
12. see Vivian McCaffrey's "Stanley B. Ryerson: Marxist Intellectual and the French-Canadian National Question," unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Ottawa, 1981.
13. see Ryerson's "For Broader...", page 19.
14. *ibid*.
15. *ibid*.
16. *ibid*, page 20.
17. *ibid*.

18. ibid
19. ibid
20. see "Three Points of Difference with Comrade Stanley Ryerson", by Sam Walsh, in Convention 69, #3, March 1969, pp 4-5
21. ibid, page 5
22. ibid, page 6
23. ibid, page 5
24. see "Get Out of the Ivory Tower", by Sam Hammond, in Convention 69, March 1969, pp 16-17
25. see Kolasky page 174, Avakumovic page 266, and also see "Relations Between the Communist Parties of Canada and the USSR since 1953: as reflected by the Communist Press in Canada", MA Thesis, by G.H. Powell, Carleton University, 1971, pp 134-135
26. "Editorial: Seven Years and a New Start", by Ryerson, in Horizons, #28, 1969, page 3
27. see the Toronto Telegram, April 19, 1969
28. ibid
29. see Avakumovic, page 266
30. see the Canadian Tribune, March 10, 1971
31. see Ryerson's review on American Communism in Crisis: 1943-1957, by Joseph Starobin, in Canadian Forum, Volume 52, February 1973
32. ibid, page 41
33. ibid, pp 41-42
34. ibid
35. see Ryerson's "Comrade Beth" in Bethune: The Montreal Years, ed. W. Macleod, L. Park, and Stanley Ryerson, Lorimer, 1978, page 163

36. Some of those criticisms of the Communist movement and the Maoist Left can be found in "American Communism in Crisis...", op. cit., "The Canada/Québec Connundrum," in Marxist Perspectives, issue # 10, 1980, and "Why I'll Vote Yes," This Magazine, Volume 14, May-June 1980.
37. The interested reader should consult the "Preface" to the 1980 re-issued version of Ryerson's French Canada, Progress Publishers, 1980, and his unpublished paper "Class and Nation -- a Variant on 'nothing else'," presented to the Canadian Political Science Association annual meetings, May 1981.

CHAPTER XIV

CONCLUSION

The Marxist academics who uncritically praise Ryerson's theoretical contribution to the new political economy and the new labour history have failed to investigate the theoretical framework which informs his work. By distinguishing Marx's materialist conception of history from Stalin's bastardized rendition of it in "Dialectical and Historical Materialism", we traced out some of the key conceptual and theoretical issues on which the Stalinist tradition departs from Marxism.

Throughout Part III of the thesis we reviewed some of Ryerson's writings to establish that he was, indeed, working within the Stalinist tradition. In Chapter VIII we saw him attempt to popularize many of the basic ideas of Stalin's theory for the Canadian audience in his book A World to Win. In Chapter IX we demonstrated Ryerson's use of the doctrine of partiinost in developing a Popular Front style analysis of the rebellions of 1837-1838. In Chapters X and XI we traced the fortunes of the People's History project as Ryerson developed his critique of bourgeois historiography, and attempted to write a "Marxist" history of Canada that coincided both with Stalinist theory and the shifting Party line. We also saw Ryerson's

second version of the events of 1937-1938, as presented in Unequal Union, while noting his role in the Party Debates of 1956 and 1968.

From the survey conducted in this thesis, we can conclude that Ryerson's political commitment to Stalinism as a political movement and a set of ideas is manifest in the theoretical and methodological framework he employed in all of his writing prior to the 1970s.

Ryerson's major theoretical writings from before 1956 are very shallow theoretically. Both 1837 and French Canada were historico-journalistic essays designed only to popularize the Party line, while creating historical precedents for it. In both cases selected historical facts were marshalled to provide a justification for the pre-established conclusion. Ryerson's reliance on the pernicious doctrine of partiinost meant a violation of the canons of sound theoretical enquiry as a dialogue between theory and evidence. Not only was original research dismissed as unessential, but the use of Stalin's vague, abstract and metaphysical version of historical materialism by Ryerson insured that whatever evidence he did examine would be analyzed in terms of a simplistic "contradiction between the forces and relations of production" formula. The net result was the 'discovery' of a Popular Front of progressive classes against reaction a century earlier. Since the Popular Front was promised on the denial in practice of independent class interests,

history was served up by Ryerson in a sanitized form, without any class differences but that between the "progressive" rebels and the "reactionary" colonial ruling class. No doubt, Marx would have been astonished to find that all class experience and consciousness was no longer dependent upon the objective circumstances in which different groups laboured to reproduce their own existence, but that instead class interests were subsumed under the categories "progressive" or "reactionary" in accordance with the 'needs' of the productive forces.

The philosophical underpinnings of Ryerson's work were expounded in A World to Win. There he systematized the technicist interpretation of human reality which he deployed throughout his other writings. The notion of cosmological laws of motion of all matter from which could be deduced the laws of motion of history was gratefully embraced by Ryerson. All the other standard features of Stalinist theory were then reproduced: a reflection theory of consciousness, a reductionist conception of production as exclusively material, a view of social relations as equivalent to property rights in a material factor of production, and so on. All of this points simply towards an acceptance of a fetishized conception of human reality which displaced the labouring social human being from the centre of history, replacing him with pre-ordained cosmic laws which dictate only that there shall be evolutionary progress fuelled by the incremental self-expansion of the productive forces.

It was with this background that Ryerson embarked upon the twenty year People's History of Canada project that eventually resulted in the publication of The Founding of Canada and culminated with the publication of Unequal Union. Despite the intervening events of 1956, Ryerson remained firmly wedded to a Stalinist interpretation of Marxism well into the decade of the sixties. By the time he began to have political and theoretical doubts about the Soviet Union -- in the mid sixties -- it was too late for those tentative doubts to be transformed into new theoretical insights that would be evident in his most important book: Unequal Union.

From its inception in 1947, the People's History project had a long and chequered history. It was redrafted several times, partly to satisfy the needs of an ever shifting Party line, and partly to satisfy the needs of the Party leadership to have an ultra-orthodox and correct version of Canada's history. It went from being a collective project to eventually being the cross of one man. The 700 odd pages of text that resulted from Ryerson's efforts was a schematic and often vague description of Canadian historical development, organized around the abstract formulae of Stalin's historical materialism -- most notably the perennial "contradiction between the forces and relations of production".

Ryerson's historical efforts were grounded in the same theoretical framework that he had used prior to 1956. His

critique of the work of Harold Innis, which developed over a twenty year period (1947-1968); showed a consistent complaint that Innis had failed to append a concern with class relations to his material-technical conception of production. We have already noted that throughout Ryerson's work a Stalinist concept of "productive forces" appears as the "driving force" behind the activity of human beings, making them mere instruments of its 'needs'. His account of the rebellions of 1837-1838 are crucially built around that notion, with the result that he devotes much of his energy to proving that the rebels were motivated by a clear cut desire to establish full blown industrial capitalism. As we saw, this flies in the face of much of the evidence that the rebellion cannot be understood in terms of industrial capitalist forces of production 'needing' to burst an existing set of feudal-mercantile and colonial property relations.

Despite continuous protestations about the quality of theoretical work in the Stalinist CPC, Ryerson must surely accept much of the responsibility himself. Throughout the decades from the depression to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, no Canadian Communist did more to popularize Stalinist theory than Stanley Ryerson. Yet, Ryerson can hardly be held personally responsible for the practical and theoretical devasement of Marxism by Stalin. "Stalinism" is the product of no one man or organization. It was a product of the defeat of the Russian

revolution, and the establishment of a new state capitalist ruling class. The degeneration of Marxism flows ultimately from that social process rather than a mere intellectual design of any individual. Ryerson was simply a young radicalizing intellectual who was swept into the Communist Party during the Depression and underwent a process of transformation into a party bureaucrat with intellectual skills. From that point on he ceased to be an intellectual and became a popularizer of the Party line.

Throughout the sixties, Ryerson drifted away from the undermined dogmas of Stalinist theory, taking a few tentative steps in new intellectual directions. He developed links with an intellectual community beyond the Party, and began -- for the first time -- to grapple seriously with ideas from outside the Communist milieu. The infusion of new influences was sufficient to mute the harsh doctrinaire quality of his work in Unequal Union, but it did not constitute a radical departure from orthodox Stalinist theory.

A necessary pre-requisite for Ryerson's intellectual explorations of the 1960s and 1970s was Khrushchev's secret speech of 1956 and the de-Stalinization drive. It is hard to imagine that the young academics of the New Left who hold Ryerson's Unequal Union in such high regard would have anything to toast if the spell of Stalin's authority had not been broken. It is a matter for speculation only, whether Unequal Union and

its author would hold such an honoured position among leftist academics if Ryerson had not resigned from the Communist Party. It is the Ryerson of the late sixties and the seventies, the Ryerson who participates in debates on the left in Quebec, the Ryerson who opposed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, and the Ryerson who wrote Unequal Union that has won recognition among a new generation of neo-Marxist intellectuals.

But the Ryerson of the late sixties and Unequal Union cannot be separated from the very dedicated and ultra-orthodox Stalinist of the decades before. Despite a new found commitment to democratic liberties and intellectual exchange, Ryerson had not abandoned the basic theoretical tenets that he had appropriated from the Stalinist tradition as the "correct" interpretation of Marx. Because Unequal Union is constructed around a technicist interpretation of Marxism that subverts Marx's efforts to place labouring man at the centre of history, it must be viewed as a product of the Stalinist tradition, rather than as a specifically "Marxist" work.

For that reason, those advocates of the new political economy and the new social history who seek to develop a specifically Marxist account of the development of Canadian capitalism would be ill advised to uncritically claim Ryerson's work as a basis for their own. Because the way in which we write history is so closely connected with the way in which we try to make it, an uncritical appropriation of Ryerson's

underlying conception of Marxism has potentially grave consequences. The ideology of Stalinism was developed in the service of a ruling class, and acceptance of its premises may entail eventual subjection to the worst critique of all -- that carried out by a class conscious working class.

The final word on Ryerson's work, and whether he made a post-1968 shift from the Stalinist tradition to the Marxist one, still remains to be written. A future commentator may some day conclude that his work is characterized by a serious discontinuity: a rupture between the Communist Party writings and those which followed 1971. But such a rupture cannot be found in the years between 1956 and 1968.

APPENDIX 1: FROM MARX TO STALIN

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Appendix 1: From Marx to Stalin

Despite our contrast of Marx's materialist conception of history with Stalin's rendition of it, some critics will insist that Stalinism represents a development of elements inherent in Marxism. Positing an essential continuity between the two depends upon the claim that Marx's theories and/or his political practice necessarily led to the phenomenon we identified as Stalinism in the Introduction. (To recapitulate, Stalinism was described as having three aspects of importance: first, a set of political practices derived from the rise of the state capitalist bureaucracy in Russia in the period of the mid 20's and adopted by Stalinized Communist Parties outside the U.S.S.R.; second, a set of ideas which constitute a technicist 'interpretation' of Marx's theories; and third, use of the Stalinized doctrine of partiinost.)

My contention is that the growth of Stalinism was the product of the defeat of the Russian Revolution and the liquidation of Lenin's Bolshevik Party.¹ It depended crucially upon the actual historical development of European capitalism and the socialist movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the previous establishment of a systematic re-interpretation of Marx's writings undertaken by Engels and the theoreticians of the Second International. It is these historical developments which account for the theoretical and political discontinuities between Marx and Stalin's respective versions of historical

materialism¹- discontinuities so great that the two qualify as conceptually and methodologically distinct theories, despite terminological similarities.

This thesis seeks to refute the view that Stalinism represents a development of Marx's writings that remain true to his original theoretical and political premises. The continuity thesis has a softer version, in which Stalinism is portrayed as one of several possible developments of Marxism, each inherent in Marx's original theoretical formulations.

Markovic has argued that "the view that Stalinist ideology and practice is the contemporary form of Marxism or that it is a necessary practical consequence of Marxist theory" is commonly adhered to by at least three kinds of people:

First, Stalinists themselves overemphasize this connection with both Marxism and Leninism for the purpose of legitimization...Second, most conservative political scholars insist on an identity...between the two in order to make Marxism as disreputable and despicable as Stalinism has been ever since the Great Purges and Krushev's revelations. Third, former Stalinists,... in their efforts to get rid of their past...who never understood much of Marx's humanism...²

When the "Marxism leads to Stalinism" thesis (or the "Marxism plus Bolshevism leads to Stalinism" variant) is advanced by serious scholars outside these three groups it is no less ridiculous in its characteristic reliance upon abstract assertions about 'inevitability', 'human nature' or whatever. This type of argument has been developed to an extraordinary degree by those defending the "Leninism leads to Stalinism" thesis, and subjected to a critique in our discussion of

Lenin below. When that argument is refuted, all that remains is the contention that Stalin's version of Marx represents 20th century Marxism-- a claim few adherents of the Communist Party would accept.

More important is the soft version of the continuity thesis between Marx and Stalinism, namely that the ambiguities inherent in Marx's theory and practice permit at least two 'valid' interpretations of his critique of capitalism: one leading to Stalinism, and the other leading to some 'non-Stalinist' conclusion. In the present context, this argument would be the claim that despite the ample evidence deployed here in support of a non-technicist interpretation of Marx's historical materialism there also exist passages in his writings which permit an equally valid yet technicist interpretation of his work. Characteristically, the presence of such equivocal elements in Marx's writings is attributed to the influence of Darwin, to a lessening of Marx's later revolutionary ardour, or to some other such development.

Without getting bogged down in the "young Marx versus the old Marx" debate, we can recognize that some of the best known passages in Marx's writings-- for example the famous "Preface" to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy-- have been cited by the Stalinist tradition in support of their own version of Marxism. Such passages are also commonly referred to by supporters of the thesis that there are elements of Stalin's theory inherent in Marx's writings. For that reason, advancing a non-technicist

interpretation of Marx's historical materialism carries with it some responsibility to account for those passages from Marx usually used to bolster the continuity thesis.

If those passages which ostensibly show Marx's equivocation on technicism are demonstrated to be comprehensible from a non-technicist interpretation, then the claim that the technicist interpretation of Marxism is a "possible" and just as "legitimate" one can be rejected. Such a conclusion is justified by the enormous evidence that Marx's work included a substantial non-technicist element (as documented and discussed in the body of the thesis). In other words, having demonstrated the hostility of much of Marx's writing to a metaphysically grounded technicist theory of history, accounting for his supposedly technicist passages will enable us to conclude that it is the technicist interpretation of Marx which is partial and selective and which focuses on a few seemingly ambiguous passages while ignoring the richness of his basic concepts. By demonstrating the possibility of a non-technicist interpretation of the so-called technicist passages in Marx, we refute the claims of those who adhere to the Stalinist version of Marxism while undermining the view that Stalinist theory merely represents a development of themes already present in Marx's writings.

Because the limitations of this thesis preclude a systematic review of Marx's "technicist" statements, an examination of Marx's crucially important "Preface" must suffice to indicate the ease with which the technicist

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interpretation of such passages can be countered by a non-technicist one.³

The "Preface" opens with Marx's claim that "legal relations as well as forms of state are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called development of the human mind." Instead of examining such phenomena in the abstract or from an idealist perspective (as with Hegel, for example), Marx explains that they "have their roots in the material conditions of life, the sum total of which..combines under the name of 'civil society'." In order to appreciate Marx's meaning we need to clarify the concepts "civil society" and "material conditions of life" (bearing in mind that he equates the two) and clarify how the "materialist conception of history" differs from the idealist interpretation. Only then can we return to discuss what Marx means when he suggests that superstructural phenomena like the state and legal relations can only be grasped in relation to the material conditions of life.

Beginning with the concept of "material life", we can point out that Marx's "Preface" also argues that during a period of historical transformation, consciousness "must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and relations of production. Similarly, in The German Ideology, Marx explains that "each stage (of history-BM) contains a material result, a sum of productive forces, a historically created relation to nature and of individuals to one another, which is handed down to each generation from its predecessor."

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In the next paragraph, Marx describes the material result of previous production as the "conditions of life which each generation find in existence."⁴ In other words, the materialist component in the "materialist" conception of history included both natural objects and powers as well as social institutions and relations. This is "materialism" in contradiction to the idealist conception of history, a view which begins with consciousness as the starting point of analysis.

Throughout the "Preface" we find this contrast between the idealist and materialist conceptions of history. Always Marx insists that the premises from which he begins are different from those of the idealist tradition; his premises "are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life (i.e., the existing forces and relations of production- BM),"⁵ rather than ideas or consciousness.

Marx's interpretation of history in the "Preface" was shaped by the same opposition to idealist interpretations of history. Hence his often quoted comment that "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." With this comment, Marx rejects both the idealist and the crude materialist interpretations of history. Marx's unbridled hostility to the dualism of both meant that he saw being and consciousness as dialectically mediated by human labour; being and consciousness were distinct but not discrete features of human reality.

As Marx put it, "Thought and being are indeed distinct, but they are also in unity with each other."⁶

Stressing the dialectical totality of being and consciousness was intended to undercut those--like the later adherents to the tradition of technicist Marxism-- who lapsed into a mechanistic and dualist form of materialism. Marx's materialism recognized consciousness as an irreducible aspect of being. Thus, in the quote from the "Preface", being determines (in the dialectical sense) consciousness, but the being of which Marx writes is itself identified as already social being rather than some abstractly conceived matter.⁷ It is, therefore, being which already assumes and includes the effects of social life and therefore, necessarily, consciousness. In other words, his conception of being is not of matter considered abstractly from man's social nature and consciousness, but of real human being.

Understanding this makes a mockery of the traditional technicist interpretation of Marxism. By indicating that specifically social being determines consciousness, Marx's "Preface" undercuts the entire basis for Stalin's contention that mind is derivative of, and secondary to, that which it reflects, namely matter conceived in the abstract. (See the discussion of Stalin's views in Chapter III above.)

With that clarified, we can now return to the point with which we began; establishing the content of Marx's concepts of "civil society" and "material life", to explain how superstructural phenomena are rooted in them.

According to the "Preface", "the sum total" of the material conditions of life, that is the sum total of forces and relations of production, "combines under the name of 'civil society'." That Marx's notion of civil society includes both the forces and relations of production is evident in the German Ideology, when he writes:

Civil society embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals within a definite stage of the development of the productive forces. It embraces the whole commercial and industrial life of a given stage....

Civil society (is-BM)...the social organisation, evolving directly out of production and intercourse, which in all ages forms the basis of the state and of the rest of the idealistic superstructure...8

This passage confirms that Marx's conception of "civil society" included both the forces and relations of production (or, as they are referred to here, the relations of "intercourse of individuals"). It also enables us to understand why Marx wrote in the "Preface" that "the sum total" of the "material conditions of life" were combined "under the name 'civil society'."

This brings us back to an important point posed in the "Preface": what does Marx mean when he says that "legal relations as well as forms of the state...have their roots in the material conditions of life (or-BM)... 'civil society'?"

Are the superstructural phenomena to be understood as discrete from the elements of the base? In another crucial passage of the "Preface" Marx explains that

...in the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, 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.

In many ways, this quote cuts to the heart of the problem. In the first sentence, Marx makes it very clear that production is irreducibly material and social, hence the reference to the "social production" of life. Marx is saying, in essence, that in the social reproduction of life, men must enter into social relations of production which are beyond their control and which correspond to a particular set of "material productive forces".

Later, in the same "Preface", Marx also refers to the "social productive forces" posing a further problem for the technicist interpretation. Not only is production a simultaneously material and social process, but apparently the productive forces also have material and social dimensions. This coincides with our discussion of the concept of productive forces (in Chapter 7 above, where we established that social relations may be productive forces), and undermines the technicist view of productive forces as material things. This point is confirmed in the "Preface" when Marx explains that relations of production can be either "forms of development of the productive forces" or "fetters" on the development. A technicist interpretation of Marx cannot account for his claim that social relations may literally be forms of the productive forces--"social" productive forces.

In the second sentence in the above quote Marx argues that "the sum total of these relations of production, (i.e., both those social relations which are productive forces

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and those which are not) "constitute the economic structure of a society." In other words, "the economic structure of a society" coincides with what is referred to as the base-- the combination of the social and material forces and the relations of production. This is "the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness."

This brings us full circle to the problem with which we began-- whether the base and the superstructure are discrete, mutually exclusive entities, or whether they stand in the same dialectical relation of interpenetration that exists, for example, between being and consciousness. (Chapter 6 of this thesis established some compelling reasons to accept the latter interpretation.)

Even considered on its own merits, Marx's discussion in the "Preface" points us toward the answer. Because the "Preface" makes it clear that the superstructure consists of two kinds of phenomena; "forms of social consciousness" as well as "legal relations and forms of the state," it is easy to establish that those superstructural relations which are not forms of consciousness-- like the state-- must be forms of social being (Marx nowhere offers any third category to accompany the distinction between social being and consciousness). Since we have already established that social being and consciousness are dialectically interpenetrating, we can conclude that as forms of social being, superstructural relations like the state form a dialectical unity with the other forms of social being embedded in the base, like the forms of property ownership, the forms of class domination in the labour process and so on. Thus, the base and super-

structure are dialectically interpenetrating concepts, as are all the concepts developed by Marx. The same point was made by Franz Jakubowski in his much neglected

Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism, published in 1936.

Social being is certainly founded in the economy, but it is not restricted to it; social relationships...reappear in the various concrete forms of the superstructure, for example in legal, political or religious relations. Similarly, superstructure cannot be identified with consciousness; it does not consist solely of ideas but embraces some highly "material" relations-- political ones, for example. Any analysis of the extent to which ideological and material relationships interpenetrate must be made individually, according to each particular case; such an analysis will reveal that all the above mentioned concepts interpenetrate dialectically. 9

In further discussion pertaining to the base/superstructure metaphor Marx writes:

With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of a natural science, and the legal, political, religious, esthetic or philosophic-- in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on 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.

In this passage, Marx has reverted back to his concern with refuting the idealist interpretation of history, hence the emphasis on the "economic foundation", and consciousness as an aspect of the superstructure. His major point was

that the material transformation of the base (i.e., the forces and relations of production) has to be distinguished from transformations of the many ideological forms of consciousness. With this, he simply repeats-- in slightly different terms-- his earlier argument that social being determines consciousness, drawing the conclusion that the basis for ideological conflict lies in the contradictions of material life.

Within the "Preface" there is additional evidence to support a non-technicist interpretation of historical materialism. While making a point about how modes of production change, Marx refers to "property relations" as "but a legal expression for...the existing relations of production," confirming that he did not make the mistake of reducing social relations of production to relations of distribution in revenues and ownership of material factors of production.

In another portion of the "Preface" Marx argues that

No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation.

From the rigid technicist perspective, in which the productive forces are conceived of exclusively as things (people are considered exclusively as material factors of production),

this claim is a straightforward example of Marx's adherence to a form of technological determinism. The claim that the old form of society cannot perish until the productive forces have achieved a certain level of development seems to make social developments entirely a development of material-technical ones. In reality, Marx meant that no social order perishes until the social productive forces (i.e., those social relations which themselves constitute productive forces, for example the collective labour which makes the collective labour of the working class an important productive force) have matured to the point where they can generate a new social order with a different social form of production.

In the final portion of the "Preface" Marx's comments refute a number of other aspects of the technicist interpretation of historical materialism. He writes:

In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production-- antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but of one arising from the social conditions of life of the individuals; at the same time the productive forces developing in the womb of the bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism. This social formation brings, therefore, the prehistory of human society to a close.

Here Marx makes no claim that his list of "progressive epochs in the economic formation of society" is either complete or the result of an ironclad evolutionary process. The technicist interpretation of the "Preface" suggests that these succeeding epochs are "progressive epochs" because

they conform to an abstract model of the evolutionary development of modes of production according to the inexorable growth of material-technical forces of production. This despite the fact that Marx's comments suggest only that the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and capitalist modes of production did actually succeed one another.

In short, the technicist interpretation of the "Preface" is seriously endangered by an actual examination of Marx's comments. Its inability to account for certain arguments we find in the text--arguments that only make any sense when interpreted from non-technicist perspective-- suggests that there is no ambivalence toward technicism in Marx's writings. Far from being susceptible to "equally legitimate" but competing technicist and non-technicist interpretations, the ostensibly technicist passages in Marx's writings do not sustain the thesis that there is a continuity between Marx's theory and Stalin's version of it.

The view that there are elements of technicism inherent in Marx's work is often premised on the claim that Marx was heavily influenced by Darwin. What Marx admired about Darwin's writings was the way in which they put an end to teleological explanation in natural history, eliminating the notion that nature developed in accordance with a cosmic design. However, he also criticised Darwin for imposing on natural development the Hobbsian notion of bellum omnium contra omnes, and for neglecting the extent to which human purposes had become the source of seemingly "natural"

processes like "natural selection".¹⁰ Moreover, we know that Marx explicitly attacked those who sought to link his own theory with Darwin's, echoing his distaste for the metaphysical conception of human history that would result from social Darwinism.

Criticizing the social Darwinist Lange, Marx wrote:

Herr Lange has made a great discovery: The whole of history can be brought under a single all encompassing law of nature. This natural law is the phrase... 'the struggle for life'... (But) instead of analyzing the struggle for life as represented historically, in various definite forms of society, (Lange) merely translates every concrete struggle into the phrase 'struggle for life'.... This is a very impressive method-- for swaggering, sham scientific, bombastic ignorance and intellectual laziness. 11

When Marx referred to the course of history as a process of natural history (as in Capital) this was a reference to the absence of conscious human control over historical development, and not an adherence to Darwin. (This point was discussed in further detail in Chapter VII.)

Technicism and metaphysical theories were introduced into 20th century Marxism through the work of Engels and the orthodox Marxists of the Second International. In such writings as Anti-Duhring and Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy¹² Engels established the foundations of what subsequently became the authoritative interpretation of Marxism-- in the process establishing the very boundaries within which Plekhanov, Kautsky and Bernstein would discuss Marx's work. Lichtheim has written that

all these writings (by Engels-BM) achieved canonical status in the labour movement at the very peak of Social Democratic influence.... It was from them, rather than from Capital... that most socialists drew their mental picture of the world. 13

Jordan explains that

For Plekhanov the first part of Anti-Duhring was the main and most authoritative source from which the philosophical views of Marx and Engels could be learned. Karl Kautsky had conceded that Capital was an altogether more powerful book but added that "only owing to Anti-Duhring did we learn to read and understand Capital the right way." 14

In his philosophical writings Engels reformulated Marxism as an evolutionary and determinist science concerned not merely with human history but with the "general laws of nature."¹⁵ His metaphysical materialist interpretation of Marxism became the basis for Stalin's later development of the notion of "dialectical materialism". Because the revision of Marx which Engels pioneered was transmitted to Stalin through the theorists of the Second International, and because Stalin codified his understanding of it as the very core of Marxism (see his essay "Dialectical and Historical Materialism"), we can only appreciate the discontinuity between Marx and Stalin if we discuss how Engels departed from Marx's arguments. Engels' materialist metaphysics was rooted in a belief that nature could be considered in abstraction from man and his labour, so we begin by summarizing how Marx pictured the relationship between man and nature.

The basis for Marx's unique concept of anthropological nature is man's practical and transformative rather than

completative relation to nature achieved through labour.

Nature interested Marx as an element of human practical critical activity, rather than as an entity in itself.

Hence his comment that "nature, taken abstractly, for itself, rigidly separated from man, is nothing for man." 16

Arguing against Feuerbach in the German Ideology, Marx elaborated on the idea of the natural material world as the product of human industry:

(Feuerbach)...does not see that the sensuous world around him is not a thing driven direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society; and indeed, (a product) in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing its industry and its intercourse, and modifying its social system according to the changed needs. 17

Marx further distinguishes between that nature which is a product of human history and any nature that might have existed before the dawn of human history, skating around the idea that nature, considered in abstraction from man, might be the object of anything other than speculative discourse. So insistent was Marx about the humanly constructed quality of nature that he wrote

So much is this activity, this unceasing sensuous labour and creation, this production, the foundation of the whole sensuous world as it now exists that, were it interrupted for only a year, Feuerbach would not only find an enormous change in the natural world, but would very soon find that the whole world of men and his own perceptive faculty, nay his own existence, were missing. Of course, in all this the priority of external nature remains unassailed... (But) for that matter, nature, the nature that preceded human history, is not by any means the nature in which Feuerbach lives, it is nature which no longer exists anywhere (except perhaps on a few Australian coral islands of recent origin...) 18

Thus Marx's materialism admits of no notion of "matter as such" and no possibility of knowing matter independently of man. This willingness to flirt with an abstract conception of nature eliminated the possibility of using a metaphysical materialism as an ontological principle for explaining the world.¹⁹ Marx's materialism is only concerned with the concrete forms of existence of nature, nature as it is internally related to man-- the natural being who reproduces nature in a transformed state.

Because Marx refused to engage in speculative discussion about "nature as such" he did not endeavor to develop a separate theory of nature alongside his materialist conception of history. For that reason, Marx only discussed a "dialectic of nature" insofar as nature is considered in its internal relation to man. Schmidt comments that for Marx,

Nature becomes dialectical by producing men as transforming, consciously acting subjects confronting nature itself as forces of nature. Man forms the connecting link between the instrument of labour and the object of labour. Nature is the Subject-Object of labour. Its dialectic consists in this: that men change their own nature as they progressively deprive external nature of its strangeness and externality, as they mediate nature through themselves, and as they make nature its work for their own purposes.

Since this relationship between man and nature is the precondition for the relationship between man and man, the dialectic of the labour process as a natural process broadens out to become the dialectic of human history in general. 20

However, as Schmidt points out, Marx's concept of nature does not deny that matter has its own laws of motion; it simply claims that they "can only be recognized and appropriately applied by men through the agency of mediating

practice." Thus, even though laws of nature exist independently of men,

men can only become certain of the operation of the laws of nature through the forms provided by their labour processes. The connection between the independence and the social determination of the laws of nature... is what Marx had in mind when he wrote,..."it is absolutely impossible to transcend the laws of nature. What can change in historically different circumstances is only the form in which these laws express themselves." 21

Schmidt summarizes what is distinctive about Marx's concept of nature when he writes

It is the socio-historical character of Marx's concept of nature which distinguishes it from the outset. Marx considered nature to be "the primary source of all instruments and objects of labour", i.e. he saw nature from the beginning in relation to human activity. All other statements about nature, whether of a speculative, epistemological, or scientific kind, already presuppose social practice, the ensemble of man's technologico-economic modes of appropriation. 22

It is because Marx did not admit to an absolute division between nature and man, that there is no fundamental distinction between natural and social science in his work. 23

Marx writes

"We know only a single science, the science of history. History can be contemplated from two sides, it can be divided into the history of nature and the history of mankind. However the two sides are not to be divided off; as long as men exist the history of nature and the history of men are mutually conditioned. 24

The abstraction of nature from its real human context was a feature of the crude materialism that Marx had criticised in his analysis of authors like Feuerbach. In his earliest formulations of the materialist conception of history, Marx had attacked both the crude materialist and idealist views

of the world for failing to place the activity of human beings at the center of their analysis. Hence Marx had claimed that his view was different from both idealism and materialism: "consistent naturalism or humanism is distinct from both idealism and materialism, and constitutes at the same time the unifying truth of both." 25

Marx rejected that crude materialism which ignored the humanly constructed character of nature because of the emphasis it placed on the deterministic influence of the environment in shaping man, to the exclusion of the importance of the human subject. In his Theses on Feuerbach he provided a systematic critique of mechanistic materialism, and indirectly, of the version of Marxism which would later base itself on technicism.

The chief defect of all previous materialism... is that things...are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in contradistinction to materialism was set forth by idealism--but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such. 26

Marx's complaint here is materialism fails to recognize the material world as the product of man's labour, while idealism neglects the practical and material character of man's objectification.. His ~~Third~~ Thesis deepens the attack on crude materialism:

The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated. Hence this doctrine is bound to divide society into

two parts, one of which is superior to society (in Robert Owen, for example).

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionising practice. 27

With this, Marx rejects all efforts to make human consciousness simply a determined product of man's environment. The determinism and dualism of crude materialism leads to a political conservatism which neglects the importance of human subjectivity and the world creating character of human labour, thereby ruling out the possibility of freedom for the underclasses. For if man is a determined product of material conditions, he can never free himself.

In this view, change is only possible because the crude materialists allow for the possibility of one exceptional section of society to rise above the determination of material conditions-- this group being entrusted with the role of emancipating society as a whole.²⁸ Thus crude materialism advances a thinly veiled justification for advancing the interests of an aspiring ruling class over and against the masses which remain determined by material conditions.

With the centrality he attributed to human labour, Marx distinguished his view of production from that which would later be attributed to him. Engels and the leaders of the Second International would draw a rigid line between material and social phenomena, in which the latter could be explained only in terms of the abstractly conceived laws of motion of nature. In the hands of Kautsky, Plekhanov and others, the metaphysical materialist interpretation of Marx would become an elaborate justification for dividing

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the working class movement into the educated leaders-- who were, naturally, exempt from the determinism of history-- and the masses.

Engels separated man from nature to consider the latter in the abstract, ultimately reducing human history to one area in which the cosmological and dialectical laws of motion of matter reveal themselves. After their co-operative theoretical efforts in the 1840s and 1850s, the respective interests of Marx and Engels diverged; Marx continued his study of political economy, while Engels was drawn more towards natural science.²⁹

In the 1870s and the decades after Marx's death, Engels returned to philosophy, writing several pieces which were intended as general statements "of the communist world outlook" for the growing socialist movement.³⁰

Engels entered the philosophical debates of his day to defend what he believed was a Marxist position on dialectics, nature and other issues. His Anti-Duhring was intended as a critique of the mechanistic materialism then popular, and the development of a specifically "dialectical" alternative. It was also the book which launched his revision of Marx.

Recent research casts grave doubts on the notion that Marx and Engels agreed on everything and saw their respective intellectual work as supplementing each other.³¹ In particular, Carver attacks the idea that Marx collaborated in any serious intellectual sense with Engels' philosophical investigations into the dialectics of nature. Carver explains that

Laws of dialectics do not appear in Marx's preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy of 1859, his popular work Wages, Price and Profit, his masterpiece Capital and associated manuscripts....What Marx actually says about social science and natural science in these works does not square with Engels's grandiose claims about matter in motion and dialectical laws. 32

Thomas refutes the suggestion by some commentators that the later Marx, like Engels, slipped into an uncritical attitude toward natural science, Darwinism and other late 19th century ideological developments. He demonstrates that Marx was thoroughly hostile to the efforts of Comte to launch a positivistic social science, and he documents Marx's rejection of abstract, universal and deterministic laws of history.³³

In his natural-scientific speculation Engels departed from Marx's anthropological conception of nature substituting an account of nature considered in the abstract, an account of the character of "matter". Marx's commitment to divesting natural science of its "abstractly material" character clearly contradicted Engels' project, and therefore vitiates the orthodox and technicist interpretation of Marx which stems from a Marxism transformed in accordance with a metaphysical materialism. As Jordan has argued

Engels established the tradition which ascribed to Marx a coherent monistic system of materialistic metaphysics in the accepted sense of this term, comprising a philosophy of nature, a theory of society, and a view of history, all three derived from a common set of first principles and logically supporting each other... If Engels had never published Anti-Duhring...nobody would have regarded Marx as a dialectical materialist in Engels's sense. Marx's own works do not contain the basic assumptions of dialectical materialism and do not justify the application

of this label to their author. (There is no-Bm)... evidence that Marx dissociated 'history' from 'nature' or differentiated between 'dialectical' and 'historical materialism' and regarded the former as logically prior to the latter. 34

In his Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, Engels argues that philosophers can be divided into two groups on the basis of their conception of the relation between thought and being; those who assert the primacy of spirit over nature are the idealists and those who assert the primacy of nature; the materialists. Engels defends "the materialism that is a general world outlook resting on a definite conception of the relation between matter and mind", while differentiating his own materialism from the "shallow and vulgarized form" of the materialist doctrine advanced during the 18th century. He writes: "The materialism of the last century was predominantly mechanical" and thus could do no justice to "processes of a chemical and organic nature." "Classical French materialism" had a second limitation, "its inability to comprehend the universe as a process-- as matter developing in an historical process. This was in accordance...with the metaphysical, i.e., anti-dialectical manner of philosophizing connected with it."³⁵ With this short book, Engels set out his method for revamping crude materialism so as to render it compatible with the "communist world outlook".³⁶

Rather than overturning it (in favour of what Marx had called "naturalism" and "humanism") Engels sought to rid it of its attachment to a mechanistic and non-dialectical conception of matter. The new materialism would be premised

on a conception of matter permeated with the dialectical notions of movement and development derived from Hegel.

Engels abandoned Marx's project of synthesizing idealism and materialism by overturning both doctrines. Instead, he sought to inject some notion of movement into abstract materialism via Hegel's dialectic. Looked at from another perspective, Engels wanted to develop a systematic and "dialectical" materialism as all-embracing as Hegel's system had been, by replacing "spirit" in the Hegelian analysis by "matter" as the new absolute.³⁷ The result was the replacement of metaphysical idealism with metaphysical materialism. Engels had missed the meaning of Marx's criticisms of Hegel and Feuerbach's work.

Engels contrasted dialectics with the "metaphysical mode of thought", describing the latter as characterised by both static and abstract categories: metaphysics was guilty "of observing natural objects and processes in isolation, apart from their connection with the vast whole; of observing them in repose, not in motion." "Dialectics, on the other hand, comprehends things...in their essential connection, concatenation, motion, origin and ending." Throughout most of his discussion, Engels identifies Hegel's great contribution to the development of a dialectical version of materialist philosophy as the representation of "the whole world, natural, historical, intellectual...as a process, i.e., as in constant motion, change, transformation, development."³⁸ In stressing Hegel's contribution to explaining dialectical movement,

Engels neglected that element in Hegel which pointed to a critique of any effort to consider nature in abstraction from the dialectical agent.

Engels believed it was necessary to adopt Hegel's "revolutionary side...the dialectical method," even though "in its Hegelian form this method was unusable." He described the process of inverting Hegel's idealist dialectic into a materialist one:

According to Hegel...the dialectical development apparent in nature and history...is only a miserable copy of the self-movement of the concept....This ideological reversal had to be done away with. We comprehended the concepts in our heads once more materialistically--as images of this or that stage of development of the absolute concept. ...Thereby the dialectic of the concept itself became merely the conscious reflection of the dialectical motion of the real world and the dialectic of Hegel was...turned off its head, on which it was standing before, and placed on its feet again. 39

With this simple inversion, "the revolutionary side of Hegelian philosophy"-- the view that "the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready made things; but as a complex of processes"⁴⁰ --could be appropriated for the materialist perspective. In the process, however, Engels had jettisoned Hegel's most important contribution to Marxism, the stress on the activity of the subject through its objectification. Engels retained the movement of the dialectic without the source of that movement, thereby undercutting the dialectic itself.

When he linked Marxism with a treatment of the laws of motion of matter in abstraction from the labouring activity of men in specific epochs of history, Engels

missed the distinction which Marx had established between the old French materialism and his own materialist conception of history; the old materialism was speculative and contemplative, while Marx's was not. Engels had obscured Hegel's contribution to Marxism by reducing it to the development of laws of dialectics-- considered by Engels in abstraction from the dialectical agent.

In Anti-Duhring Engels established the philosophical basis for his metaphysical view of nature with the following theses:

1. The unity...of the world consists in its materiality.
2. The basic forms of all being are space and time...
3. Motion is the mode of existence of all matter. Never and nowhere has there ever existed, or can there exist, matter without motion. ⁴²

What distinguishes this materialism from that of his philosophical predecessors was its non-static character and its resistance to reductionism. Within the material unity of the world, matter developed into higher forms of existence that could not simply be reduced to its lower forms. As Schmidt explains, for Engels "mechanical, chemical, biological and psychic forms of motion are qualitatively distinct from each other, and yet they are modes of appearance of the one material essence of the world."⁴³ With his claim that the unity of the world consisted of its materiality, Engels departed from Marx's view that practical human labour bound together the realm of consciousness and that of being, the sphere of the social and that of nature. ⁴⁴

By considering nature in abstraction from man (what he called "matter"), Engels believed he had established an ontological basis for those dialectical laws which he claimed were the "mode of existence, the inherent attribute, of matter."⁴⁵ He abstracted three principles of dialectical movement from the nature of material reality, those of contradiction, the negation of the negation, and the transformation of quantity into quality. Together they constituted the basis for a dialectical method which he believed could be used to investigate nature, history, and consciousness. According to Engels, these laws of dialectics were universally applicable, transforming Marxism from a critical theory of society into what one author describes as a "speculative materialist metaphysics."⁴⁶

Because Engel's dialectics were elaborated in connection with the speculative theories of nature, abstracted "from that which would bring them into dialectical motion: historical practice"⁴⁷, his theory is susceptible to the same criticisms Marx first levelled against Feuerbach.

For Engels, nature and man are not united primarily through historical practice; man appears only as a product of evolution and a passive reflection of the process of nature, not, however, as a productive force. If the materialist conception of nature, as Engels wrote in Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy is nothing other "than a simple conception of nature as it presents itself to us, without any external trimmings", this means, in comparison with Marx's own position, a relapse into naive realism. ⁴⁸

By divorcing dialectics from man and the social mediation of nature, Engels ended up reducing Marx's views to the

materialism of Feuerbach. Subsequent generations credited Marx with the view that consciousness was a mere byproduct of matter, a view which Marx's emphasis on the practical subjectivity of labour was incompatible with. (The reflection theory of consciousness relied upon by Stalin and others in the technicist tradition was actually first developed by Engels.)⁴⁹

Because Engels had developed his theory in abstraction from human labour, he was guilty of a similar mistake to that committed by Feuerbach. For that reason, many of the criticisms first initiated by Marx against Feuerbach also provide the basis for a critique of the technicist current of Marxism to which Engels' writings gave birth.

In Engels' hands, the dialectic became a 'method' derived from the simple inversion of Hegel's dialectic, and verified in its ability to organize and explain the laws of the universe. Thus, nature, considered in abstraction from man, attained dialectical capacity, while human history was reduced to a special case of a cosmology embracing the universe.

Marx had been attracted to Hegel's philosophy, because its emphasis on the constitutive activity of mind presented him with the key to his own concept of material activity (praxis), wherein consciousness reappears as the specifically human form of natural existence. For Engels the stress lies on Hegel's conceptual machinery whereby material motion is invested with logical certainty. What really fascinates him is Hegel's determinism: his ability to make it appear that nature (and history) follow a pre-ordained course.⁵⁰

Jordan is quite correct to point out that what Engels

did was to take Marx's dialectical and 'materialist' conception of human history as legitimation for applying Hegel's dialectics to nature in abstraction from human history. By regarding the materialist conception of history as "a philosophical theory of historical causation", Engels was able to focus on discovering "the ultimate cause" of history, in the hope of reducing it to a set of abstract laws.

Engels's concern with the final cause or the ultimate decisive factor in history and his insistence on the reduction of a sequence of events to 'inner hidden laws' transformed a sociological hypothesis and a historical point of view into a speculative and metaphysical doctrine, with the appearance, but not the substance, of a scientific theory. 51

It was in this way that Engels extended the purview of dialectics from human history to nature abstracted from man (and called 'matter'), and ultimately to the universe. That meant that he could return to Hegel's dialectic as the basis for his cosmology, since the dialectic had been abstracted from the rather more limited sphere of its operation in Marx's work. As Jordan explains,

The 'general laws of motion', which according to Engels govern the development of nature, human society, and thought, are not those discovered in the historical process by Marx but Hegel's laws of dialectics. 52

He then cites Engels' confession from Anti-Duhring:

I undertook the study of mathematics and natural science to convince myself also in details-- of what in general I was not in doubt-- that in nature...the same dialectical laws of motion force their way through as those which in history govern the fortuitousness of events...the laws which Hegel first developed in all embracing but mystic form... 53

Engels was far too uncritical of Hegel, and the

Hegelian dialectic;

he closed the door to the idealist meaning Hegel attached to his own categories. Therefore, when Hegel spoke of 'objective logic', Engels immediately tended towards a natural-scientific interpretation of this objectivity... Instead of applying the Hegelian categories in a concrete, materialist way by redefining them in social terms, Engels applied them externally to particular scientific facts, which are dependent for their existence precisely on their abstraction from that which could bring them into dialectical motion: historical practice. 54

In the hands of the leaders of the Second International, this metaphysical materialism would be transformed into a theory of history predicated on a technicist conception of human production, with all that entails. Having defined dialectics as the "science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought"⁵⁵, Engels was able to use his general and abstractly developed laws of dialectics in subsequent examinations of human history. That was a potential inherent in the "dialectics of nature" conception, which was not fully realized in the work of Engels. The application of completely abstract laws of dialectics to history as the specific understanding of historical materialism was an achievement of the Second and Third Internationals. Harris makes substantially the same point:

The belief that Marxism was part of an atemporal and deterministic science was already emerging in the later writings of Engels, and Marx himself detected the same tendency among some of his followers when he declared that he was not a "Marxist"; his work, he said, was only an "historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe", not "an historico-philosophic theory of the marche-generale imposed by fate upon every people, whatever the historic circum-

stances in which it finds itself." The warning did not prevent Engels from generalizing some of the methodological principles Marx employed in the analysis of European history (where man was the sole creator) to the world of nature. Generalisations about man's activity came to be seen as merely particular applications of 'general laws of nature'.

Man was therefore ruled by scientifically determinable laws which, Engels claimed, were embodied in a doctrine which came to be known as "dialectical materialism". The implications of the shift were immense for "dialectical materialism" could easily become a kind of religious doctrine, without reference to a particular time or place, a theory of the cosmology, not a method of analysis for quite clearly specified purposes. 56

Engels' theorizing on dialectics and nature established the precedent for others more intent on interpreting Marx's theory as a technicist one. Having eliminated the subject of history-- the human working activity of men-- from the metaphysical foundations of his theory, Engels could only relate man and nature in an immediate fashion, making man and consciousness a determined product of matter. This lack of regard for the importance of practical human labour as the internally mediating factor between nature and society, inspired the leadership of the Second International to see that relation as a causal one between two discrete and externally related factors.

In his own lifetime, Engels assumed the responsibility for debunking the increasingly popular technological determinist interpretation of Marx's work. After Marx's death, Engels had to explain,

Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasize the main principles vis a vis

our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place, or the opportunity to give their due to the other factors involved in the interaction. 57

To parry the thrust of those who interpreted Marx as a technological determinist, Engels promoted the idea that Marx believed the factors of history (e.g. the 'economy' and 'politics') mutually influence each other in their interaction. The following quote is typical:

Political, religious, juridicial, philosophical, literary, artistic, etc. development is based on economic development. But all these react on one another and also upon the economic basis. It is not that the economic situation is cause, solely active, while everything else is only passive effect. There is, rather, interaction on the basis of economic necessity, which ultimately always asserts itself. 58

Engels paints historical materialism as a view in which history is the outcome of the interaction of discrete historical factors. The internal dialectical relation between elements like the 'economy' and superstructural phenomena as products of the same human objectification could be readily forgotten, just as the internal relation of nature and man had been ignored in Engels' creation of a dialectical variety of materialism. Henceforward, Marxists could call on Engels' authority to justify a version of historical materialism that ignored human agency and posited a non-dialectical dualism between the productive forces and the productive relations, or between the base and the superstructure.

In his efforts to sidestep technological determinism,

Engels failed to appreciate how his interaction-of-factors alternative lead ultimately to conclusions similar to those he sought to dispel.

Engels tried to leave an escape clause (to this mechanical materialist interpretation of Marx-BM) by stating that the 'ideological spheres' can re-act on their own socio-economic causes; but this formulation does not basically change the systematic role of matter as the prime mover. 59

Nor does it restore labour and subjectivity to their proper place in the materialist conception of history. When he endorsed universal interaction instead of simple causality between the factors of history, Engels omitted that peculiar 'interaction' which involves man's impact on nature through his working activity. Not surprisingly, then, Engels could identify technique as the driving force of history:

What we understand by the economic conditions which we regard as the determining basis of the history of society are the methods by which human beings in a given society produce their means of subsistence and exchange the products among themselves... Thus the entire technique of production and transport is here included. According to our conception this technique also determines the method of exchange and, further, the division of products, and with it... the division of classes also and hence the relations of lordship and servitude and with them the state, politics, law, etc. 60

When the theorists of the Second International sought to isolate one factor of history as the decisive one, they had the precedent for selecting technological development. Even Engels' self criticism could not correct the dualism inherent in his analysis. He had tried to straddle the fence by combining a pluralistic interaction-of-factors

theory with his own frank admission that in the end, the economy "ultimately always asserts itself."⁶¹ By Marx's standards, his efforts must be judged a failure. By deriving the laws of motion of human history from cosmological laws of motion of all matter, Engels had paved the way for subsequent generations to develop a calculus-like set of formulae (a set of supra-historical and immutable laws) for analysing history in general-- for example, "the contradiction between the forces and relations of production". History was reduced to one area of application of the natural laws of motion of all matter that Engels believed had been extracted from Hegel. He admitted that these laws which operate in nature as blind, unconscious forces are mediated through the will and activity of men in history, but he did so in a manner which reduced men to the pawns of these laws. Thus he established a theme that would be prominent in the work of theorists like Stanley Ryerson.

By subordinating human history to a set of supra-historical and immutable natural laws, Marx's effort to unmask the laws of motion of capitalism as different from natural laws was subverted. Marx sought to demonstrate that the laws were the product of a situation in which the producers had no control over their conditions of life, and where-- as a consequence-- their mutual relations had taken on an independent existence which confronted them as an external and coercive power. By contrast, Engels' work made the dialectical laws of motion which govern the evolution of society universal and permanent.⁶²

The metaphysical interpretation of Marxism developed by Engels included a reflection theory of knowledge, a view which "cuts off knowledge from its mediation through the synthetic activities of the subject and reduces it to a passive and uncritical reproduction of a separate object undergoing a law governed evolutionary process." This laid the basis for a technicist variant of socialism in which human freedom was to be based on a knowledge of the laws of motion of society by an elite, rather than their abolition. Mendelson explains:

because he (Engels-BM) had conceived of the dialectical 'laws' as immutable natural laws, he could no longer envision a praxis which led to their abolition. On the other hand, knowledge of natural laws can be 'applied'. Though dialectical laws have asserted themselves as external necessities up till now, it is possible to grasp them and "apply them consciously". Here Engels' tendency to reinterpret the relation of Marxist theory to practice positivistically...emerges. 'Scientific Socialism'-- the adequate 'conscious reflex' of the universal laws of motion-- could apply its knowledge technologically to social life, evidently in the same way that natural scientific knowledge is used for the prediction and control of natural processes. The practical realisation of a critical social theory would thus be equated with the technical application of a physical theory. While Marx wanted to abolish 'laws', Engels wanted to know and control them. ...All this indicates that Engels understood the goal of 'making history with will and consciousness' not as the suppression of the sway of reified historical forces but as an existence based on knowledge of unchanging dialectical ones. 63

In the work of Plekhanov and Kautsky, the materialist conception of history was reduced to a philosophy of history, characterized by a series of mutually exclusive but interacting factors. In The Fundamental Problems of

Marxism, Plekhanov presented his version of this list as follows:

1. The state of the productive forces; 2. the economic relations conditioned by these forces;
3. the socio-political regime, established upon a given economic "base"; 4. the mentality of men living in society...determined in part directly by the economic conditions obtaining, and in part by the entire socio-political system that has arisen on that foundation; 5. the various ideologies reflecting the above mentality. 64

Colletti adroitly points out that in this sequence, the productive forces develop autonomously of the other factors, providing the premise upon which development of the other factors is determined (in the causal sense).⁶⁵ In fact, by culling the works of Kautsky and Plekhanov, Colletti illustrates the degree to which the two most important theorists of the Second International developed a conception of Marxism premised on the separation of material life from social life. For example, Colletti quotes Kautsky:

"The production of the means of subsistence and the production of men are two essentially different processes", Kautsky affirms..."the relationship between the labourer and things, technique, like that between the consumer and the things he consumes, is clearly something quite different from the relation entered into by men in the labour process, in the economy. Only the latter is social, the former is not." 66

Here the separation is between the material labour process and the 'economic' (i.e. the relations of distribution). With that sort of unmediated dualism, the theorists of the Second International had no option but to identify either the material or the social as the motive force of history. In Plekhanov, for example, changes in social relations were derivative from the development of productive forces

(i.e. in the reductionist sense), and geographic factors. This reduction of human history to a function of the history of spontaneous geographic and technological development and ultimately to laws of matter was typical of the Social Democrats. Thus, Kautsky failed to distinguish between human and natural history, arguing

that the history of humanity merely constitutes a special case of the history of living beings, with peculiar laws, which are however related to the general laws of living nature. 67

For him, the laws of motion of human history were merely forms of appearance of biological laws.

Sawer quotes Plekhanov as saying that "Marxism is Darwinism in its application to social science".⁶⁸ Both Plekhanov and Kautsky followed Engels in interpreting Marxism as a "synthesis of the Hegelian dialectic and Feuerbachian naturalism"-- as Plekhanov put it.⁶⁹ They took no account of man's humanizing effect on nature, treating the latter as an externally given entity rather than a product of industry. They duplicated Engels' mistakes, in conceiving of nature in the abstract.

In this sense, the Marxism of the Second International ignored the differences between Marx's materialism and that advanced by Feuerbach. Thus, Plekhanov could write that

In Marx's Theses on Feuerbach...none of the fundamental ideas of Feuerbach's philosophy are refuted; they merely amend them...the materialist views of Marx and Engels have been elaborated in the direction indicated by the inner logic of Feuerbach's philosophy! 70

Marxism became a theory of the cosmology and historical

materialism became a contemplative "science of society" rather than a method of analysis capable of advancing the cause of the working class. As such, Marxism remained of great importance to the leaders of the Second International as an ideological justification for the existence of huge reformist parties that proclaimed the objective necessity of their cause.

It had the further function, however, of assisting in the substitution of the party for the masses, as the repository of socialist consciousness. If historical materialism was a science it was more likely to be mastered by the scientists (i.e., the party theorists) than by the masses. 71

As Marx had argued in his Theses on Feuerbach, mechanistic materialism can only countenance social change if some class is given historical dispensation from the determinism of the laws of history. The Second International surpassed Engels' bastardization of Marxism by institutionalizing the elitist potential inherent in metaphysical materialism. However, the peculiar combination of determinism and voluntarism which characterised Social Democratic politics would only be perfected when the technicist interpretation of Marxism became the ideology of a Soviet ruling class, embarked upon a crash programme of state capitalist primitive accumulation.

Because the orthodox Marxism of the Second International conceived of capitalist society as undergoing a gradual and inevitable evolution toward socialism (as governed by the overall laws of motion of all matter), and because the role of human agency as the moving force of history was systematically denied, the Social Democrats saw no need

for a party that would promote the idea that the working class should be the author of its own history.

The line of theoretical descent from Engels through the Second International to the leadership of the Third International is unmistakable. Despite their eventual differences, both Bernstein and Kautsky shared the view that the Engels/Kautsky version of Marxism was the genuine article. No one questioned the technicist conception of production elaborated in the Second International as somehow diverging from Marx. As Colletti has documented, both Bernstein and Kautsky revised Marx's concept of the social relations of production to mean forms of property ownership (i.e., a function of relations of distribution), while reducing the concept of production from simultaneously material and social process to an exclusively material one. In this manner, production was emptied of any specific socio-historical content and the way was cleared for a technological determinism rooted in supra-historical laws of development.

As Colletti concludes:

The main consequence of this...approach, which runs more or less openly through all Marxism of the period...is the divorce of 'production' and 'society', of materialism and history, the separation of man's relation with nature from the simultaneous relations between men. In short, the result is an incapacity to see that without human or social mediation, the very existence of labour or productive activity is inconceivable. 72

Not surprisingly, the adherence to the technicist conception of production by the leaders of the Second International was combined with the same desire to rationalize

and to centralize capitalism through reform found in Stalin's writings-- the only difference being that Stalin implemented his programme of rationalization through the systematic use of violence. For orthodox Marxists, the socialised forces of capitalist production (i.e., the technical division of labour in the capitalist factory, the centralized co-ordination of production, and the rational implementation of planning) represent the potentiality of socialism. The contradictions of capitalism are reduced to a single contradiction between the private form of capitalist appropriation and the resultant anarchy on the market, and the reality and discipline of the technical division of labour within the factory where planning reigns supreme. The extension of this technical rationality from the factory to society as a whole was viewed as socialism.⁷³

Orthodox Social Democracy was the product (and producer) of a fatalistic version of Marxism in which the growth of its party was seen as proceeding smoothly and steadily as an inevitable consequence of the expansion of capitalism. The Social Democratic leaders saw their task as the gradual spreading of their influence through electoral victories, and the education of the masses until such time as the party could win a majority in parliament. Lenin's revitalization of Marxism centred around establishing the philosophical and political basis for a "party which aimed not passively to...await the working out of iron historical laws, but actually to intervene in the shaping of history."⁷⁴

The thesis that Stalinism is inherent in Marxism invariably finds support in the more widely accepted position that Stalinism is inherent in Leninism. Many commentators-- usually of a conservative political persuasion-- see Marxism, Leninism and Stalinism as part of the very same tapestry. Others see Marx's writings as equivocal in character, with a crude mechanistic current being developed in the work of Lenin and then Stalin. In this view, a much stronger claim is being made about the relation between Lenin and Stalin than that about the relation of the two of them to Marx.

It is my contention that the revisionist current of technicist Marxism initiated by Engels and transmitted through the Second International to Lenin and Stalin was joined by a political practice that reflected the technicist theory, while violating the cardinal rules of Marx's revolutionary politics. Social Democratic reformism preached the capture of the bourgeois state rather than its destruction, and based itself on an elitist and bureaucratic party which was seen as the embryo of the new state. ⁷⁵ Lenin's theoretical and political work represents a partial but nevertheless crucial break with the tradition of orthodox Marxism.

That break from the tradition established by Engels cannot be appreciated if we search Lenin's writings for detailed theoretical discussions of the materialist conception of history. Instead we have to look to his theoretical works on the question of the party, his phil-

osophical investigations of Hegel, his revival of the Marxist theory of the state, and his insistence of the possibility of a workers' revolution in Russia in 1917, and so on. His mainly political break from orthodox Marxism was not systematized at the level of theory, and his brief rejuvenation of the spirit of Marxism quickly succumbed to the early degeneration of the revolution under domestic and international pressures. Stalin's rise to power meant not only the subjection of the working class to a new ruling class but the destruction of the Party built by Lenin (through expulsions and murder) and the elimination of any critical currents diverging from a technicist interpretation of Marx. When the technicist reading of Marx was resurrected and codified by Stalin, it was no longer as simply the theoretical stance of a social democratic party restricted to parliamentary opposition, but as the property of a state ruling class committed to a policy of industrialisation and backed by a monopoly of the means of violence. In this sense, Stalinism represents not merely a continuity with the militant technicism and reformism of pre-war Social Democracy, but a genuine development of it. Stalinism equals the technicism of the Second International plus the theory of socialism in one country and control of the state apparatus. As an actual instrument of state capitalist rule, Stalin's technicist interpretation of Marxism could only be of ideological use to the new ruling class when the extreme determinism inherited from the Second International was supplemented by the voluntarism associated with Stalin's

concept of partiinost.

In a recent article, the historian Stephen Cohen surveyed the literature on the thesis that Bolshevism (or Leninism) and Stalinism are "to be interpreted in terms of fundamental continuity or discontinuity," finding a consensus within the literature that "no meaningful difference or discontinuity... (exists-BM) between Bolshevism and Stalinism." As Cohen explains, the only dispute about the inexorable march of Stalinism seems to be whether it should be dated from the 1902 writing of Lenin's What Is to Be Done?, the October revolution, the 1921 ban on party factions or some other date.⁷⁶

The continuity thesis sees the forced collectivization of agriculture, the show trials and the mass execution and incarceration of millions of people under Stalin as "derived from the political--that is the ideological, programmatic, and organisational-- nature of original Bolshevism." As Cohen points out, defenders of this thesis typically rely on a deterministic explanation centering around some single universal factor (e.g., the "inevitability" of bureaucratic degeneration of organisations like the Bolshevik party), which undercuts the need for serious historical explanation. Relying on Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy, for example, substitutes a simple ahistorical formula that makes historical explanation of the actual development of Stalinism unnecessary.⁷⁷ The plausibility of such arguments derives from their highly abstract and therefore universal character; a few supposedly universal truths--

about human nature, human organisation, or whatever-- become the basis for an instant sociological analysis, dispensing with the more complicated task of historical explanation.⁷⁸ Establishing the continuities and discontinuities between Leninism and Stalinism, or between any two historical phenomena requires careful empirical analysis rather than bald assertions.

Duncan Hallas makes the point, that in the purely formal sense the emergence of Stalinism from Bolshevism is incontestable. However, "this does not get us very far. By the same reasoning Jesus Christ was the father of the Spanish Inquisition and Abraham Lincoln the father of United States imperialism..."⁷⁹ This version of the continuity thesis ignores the fact that "every historical period--each political phenomenon--has antecedents, "seeds", in the preceding one... In itself ... this demonstrates nothing about continuity, much less about causality, much less about causality or inevitability."⁸⁰ Similarly, Victor Serge has written that

It is often said that "the germ of all Stalinism was in Bolshevism at its beginning." Well I have no objection. Only, Bolshevism also contained many other germs-- a mass of other germs... To judge the living man by the death germs which the autopsy reveals in a corpse... is this very sensible? ⁸¹

After all, which germs flourish and which stagnate, which of numerous potential outcomes actually occurs, depends entirely upon the actual concrete circumstances. Acknowledging the purely formal reality that Bolshevism and Leninism did lead to Stalinism in no way absolves us of the

responsibility of explaining why that particular outcome happened.

Having countered some of the most common arguments employed in defending the position that Leninism (or Bolshevism) inevitably or necessarily lead to Stalinism, (and, by implication, the logic of using similar arguments to argue that Marx's writings necessarily lead to Stalinism), it is now time to turn to some of the evidence that Leninism actually represented a departure from the orthodox Marxism of the Second International.

Lenin's pre-World War I record as a Marxist is plagued by an inconsistency between his spirited intellectual defence of orthodox technicist Marxism (with all its reformist and determinist implications), and his practical political stress on the role of subjectivity in making history. This tension is evident particularly in his writings on the theory of the party (a sphere in which Lenin has been much abused and little understood), an excellent account of which can be found in Marxism and the Party, by John Molyneux. Establishing that the Leninist theory of the party represents a break from the fatalistic Marxism of the Second International, and a genuine return to themes evident in Marx would require a lengthy discussion which cannot be conducted here. Accordingly, we will examine Lenin's contributions on a few other questions for some indication of the thrust of his break from technicist Marxism.

Nineteen fourteen was a critical year for Marxism, and the onset of the war pushed Lenin to break with the

Marxism of the Second International. The capitulation of the Social Democratic parties to national chauvenism and support for the war forced Lenin to re-examine his theoretical inheritance from the movement. His "back to the basics" re-examination of Marx's works led him to a two-year study of Hegel, leading to a "rediscovery of Hegel's dialectic and his assertion that no Marxist had understood Capital for a quarter of a century."⁸² Reading Hegel lead Lenin to restore the primacy of human activity in Marxist theory.

"His Philosophical Notebooks show how completely he reorganised his conception of the relationship between the materialist or economic forces, and the human, subjective forces, the relationship between science and human activity."⁸³ His reading of Hegel served as the basis for a return to Marx's original notion of history as a process in which the practical activity of the working class is central.

Lenin's pre-1914 philosophical views were aired in his 1908 publication of Materialism and Empirico-Criticism.⁸⁴ In it he defended a variety of the crude materialism popular in the Second International, arguing that matter exists independently of and prior to consciousness. His interpretation of Marx's materialism attributed to the material world an objective and external reality. Epistemologically, he argued that sensations were the mirror-like reflections of the external world in the minds of people. Thus, before reading Hegel, Lenin's own philosophical views did not emphasize the active role of human consciousness in

creating and altering both the material and the social world. He emphasized the causal impact of the material world on consciousness and social development in conformity with the philosophical views developed by Engels.

Marx's theoretical work is completely incompatible with Lenin's view of consciousness as merely a passive reflection of the material world, a conception derived uncritically from Feuerbach's materialism. Lenin had missed the point of Marx's first Thesis on Feuerbach, which identified "the chief defect of all previous materialism" as an inability to conceive natural reality as the product of "sensuous human activity, practice"-- that is, an inability to recognize the "active side" of man.⁸⁵

Lenin's War-time Philosophical Notebooks trace both his confrontation with Hegel and his own previously held views. In short terse comments on what he is reading, Lenin breaks with his old views:

Man's consciousness not only reflects the objective world, but creates it. the world does not satisfy man and man decides to change it by his activity.⁸⁶

Lenin's condemnation of his own tradition of mechanical Marxism was complete, as he realized he had been one of the Marxists who "criticized the Kantians...more in a Feuerbachian than in a Hegelian manner."⁸⁷

Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks challenged the Marxism of the Second International, as Lowy explains, citing Lenin's notes:

Lenin insists on the philosophical abyss separating "stupid", i.e., "metaphysical, undeveloped dead, crude" materialism from Marxist

materialism which, on the contrary, is nearer to "intelligent", i.e., dialectical, idealism. Consequently, he criticizes Plekhanov severely for...having criticized Kant from the standpoint of vulgar materialism rather than in the manner of Hegel. 88

In another passage Lenin contrasts the vulgar materialist conception of evolutionary development in history and the dialectical conception of development:

the first conception...(development as decrease and increase)...is lifeless, pale and dry. The second...(development as a unity of opposites)...alone furnishes the key to the "self-movement"... to the "leaps", to the "break in continuity", to the "transformation into the opposite", to the destruction of the old self-movement, its driving force...remains in the shade (or this source is made external --God, subject, etc.) In the second conception the chief attention is directed precisely to knowledge of the source of "self"-Movement. 89

All of this stands in sharp contrast to Stalin's philosophical positions, with their unquestioning acceptance of the metaphysical materialism handed down from the tradition of the Second International. More to the point, not only did Stalin base his "Dialectical and Historical Materialism" on the legacy of Engels' interpretation of Marx, but in the decades of his rule he also relied philosophically on Lenin's Materialism and Empirico-Criticism while ignoring the potentially dangerous Philosophical Notebooks.⁹⁰

Lowy argues that Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks constitute a radical break from technicist Marxism, a philosophical break that pre-dated his formulation of new political perspectives on questions like evolutionism:

1

It is difficult not to find the red thread leading from the methodological premises of the Notebooks to Lenin's (April-BM) theses of 1917; from the category of sum-total (i.e., totality-BM) to the theory of the weakest link in the imperialist chain; from the interpenetration of opposites to the transformation of the democratic revolution (of February 1917-BM) into the socialist revolution (of October 1917-BM); from the dialectical conception of causality to the refusal to define the character of the Russian revolution solely by Russia's 'economically backward base'; from the critique of vulgar evolutionism to the break in continuity in 1917; and so on... But what is most important is quite simply that the critical reading ... of Hegel had freed Lenin from the straight-jacket of the pseudo-orthodox Marxism of the Second International... 91

In other words, there is a close and intimate connection between Lenin's philosophical critique manifest in the 1917 April Theses and the slogan "All Power to the Soviets".

It was Lenin's philosophical break with orthodox Marxism that enabled him a few years later to write State and Revolution as a guide for the creation of the Russian workers' state, despite his previous rejection of the Paris Commune as a model of importance to the coming Russian revolution. Both the April Theses and State and Revolution represent serious departures from orthodox Marxism. We shall consider each of them in turn.

Michael Lowy has recently demonstrated how Lenin's April Theses constituted a decisive break with the Marxism of the Second International, prompting one contemporary observer to exclaim that these theses constituted "the negation of Social Democratic doctrine and of scientific Marxism. Lenin, leader of our party is dead. A new Lenin,

an anarchist Lenin, is born."⁹² This anarchist Lenin was the architect of a sharp about face, when he insisted that a workers' revolution was possible in a backward country, previously considered fit only for a bourgeois democratic revolution. Prior to 1917, Lenin remained wedded to the orthodox Marxist view that a backward country like Russia could not undergo a proletarian revolution without first passing through a capitalist stage of development. To him, a Russian revolution would necessarily be limited to the demand for democracy, an understanding which Lenin insisted "flows necessarily from the whole of Marxist philosophy" (i.e. from the gradualism of the Second International).⁹³

Not surprisingly, his Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution (written in 1905) rejected the Paris Commune as a model for the future Russian revolution. Lenin explained that the Commune had failed because it was

unable(to) distinguish between the elements of a democratic revolution and a socialist revolution, a government that confused the tasks of fighting for a republic with those of fighting for socialism...it was a government such as ours should not be. (in any future revolution in Russia-BM)⁹⁴

Until 1917 Lenin would maintain that the Paris Commune arose from the conditions of struggle for bourgeois democracy, as would any future Russian revolution. And he would steadfastly argue--in accordance with the orthodox Social Democratic interpretation-- that the Paris Commune had contributed to its own downfall by striving to establish socialism rather than limiting its objectives to the

establishment of bourgeois democracy. Similarly, any Revolution in backward Russia could not immediately be socialist in character.

Thus, Lenin subscribed to that mechanistic version of Marx's materialism which reduced the dialectic to a kind of Darwinian evolutionary process which determined the different stages of history (slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism) as a rigid sequence of stages governed by the abstract "laws of history". With such a view, little wonder that Plekhanov, upon hearing of the October Revolution, could only pronounce, "But it is a violation of all the laws of history!" 95

Until Lenin's April Theses of 1917 virtually every important Marxist theoretician (with the notable exception of Trotsky) believed that the socialist revolution could only occur in industrial countries. Orthodox Social Democracy

argued that countries would achieve workers' power in strict conformity with the stage to which they had advanced technologically. Backward countries could only see their future image mirrored in the advanced countries. Only after a long process of industrial development and a transition through a parliamentary bourgeois regime could the working class mature enough to pose the question of socialist revolution. 96

Hence Social Democrats in Russia believed the coming revolution would be a bourgeois revolution. When it did occur, Lenin launched a campaign within the Bolshevik Party--initially against the opposition of the vast majority of the Party's members-- for the idea that the revolution must proceed to overthrow the new provisional government and the rule

of the bourgeoisie.⁹⁷

After the February revolution of 1917 the Mensheviks and the overwhelming majority of the Bolsheviks believed, in accordance with the mechanical nature of their Marxism, that the aftermath of the revolution must result in the ascendance of the bourgeoisie, since that was pre-ordained by the immutable laws of history. For Lenin, on the other hand, the fate of the revolution could not be explained in terms of supra-historical and immutable laws of history. The outcome of the February revolution was to be decided by the activity of the various classes at play in the situation.⁹⁸ In this sense, Lenin's leadership of the Bolshevik Party through the Russian revolution represents a radical break from the technicist tradition of Marxism. He was rejecting the determinism of orthodox Marxism's metaphysical laws of history in favour of the possibility that the Russian working class could establish a workers' state in a backward country-- a beachhead he hoped would pave the way for an impending European revolution.

Lenin's conversion in 1917 to the theory of permanent revolution required a commitment to a form of internationalism that went way beyond the national chauvenism demonstrated⁹⁹ by the Second International during World War I, and the nationalism that complemented Stalin's theory of socialism in one country. Lenin's insistence that the Russian revolution could only persist with the success of the European revolution represents a return to a theme developed by Marx.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, the April Theses echoed the arguments Marx elaborated in explaining the failure of the revolutionary upsurge of 1848-49. Draper has recently demonstrated that Marx himself undercut the rigid stages theory of development by insisting that the bourgeoisie had already lost its revolutionary potential by the mid-19th century, leaving the task of revolution throughout Europe to the working class.¹⁰¹

Lenin's April Theses represented a return to Marx's stress on the importance of human subjectivity, human action, to the historical process, and therein lies their significance. His practical rehabilitation of Marxism got another boost from the little book State and Revolution-- a damning critique of the Social Democratic preoccupation with capturing the capitalist state machinery rather than destroying it. Excavating the work of Marx on the Paris Commune Lenin called for the destruction of the Russian state and its replacement with workers' councils and soviets. Having rehabilitated the idea that the Paris Commune was a genuine effort to establish a workers' state

Lenin proclaimed the Soviets (in Russia-BM) to be a "power of the same type as the Paris Commune of 1871"-- a power whose source was "not a law previously discussed and passed by parliament, but a direct initiative of the popular masses from below." 102

State and Revolution represents a critique of important features of the technicist interpretation of Marxism. Like Marx, Lenin displayed none of the fascination for nationalized property (i.e., the form of property ownership, or the relations of distribution) that became

the Communist obsession under Stalin. In an important pamphlet written just after State and Revolution, he explained that

The important thing will not even be the confiscation of the capitalists' property, but country wide, all embracing workers' control over the capitalists...Confiscation alone leads nowhere... 103

Lenin's resurrection of Marx's theory of the state meant that he had overcome that narrow economism of the Second International, which had come to associate socialism with state ownership of property (and therefore the 'abolition' of the form of private property), and the political 'control' of the supposedly neutral capitalist state by an electoral majority of Social Democrats. Throughout the revolution, Lenin continued to maintain that the dictatorship of the proletariat meant first and foremost, not the destruction of property forms, but the extension of workers' control over industry; and the strengthening of working class self-government through the dictatorship of the workers themselves.¹⁰⁴

Lenin's 1917 writings reaffirmed the crucial importance of the self-activity of the working class in making history through the establishment of a workers' state. Thus, he writes;

we demand an immediate break with the prejudiced view that only the rich, or officials chosen from rich families, are capable of administering the state (i.e., the new workers' state-BM)... We demand that training in the work of state administration be conducted by class conscious workers...at once... The chief thing is to imbue the oppressed and the working people with confidence in their own strength... The conscientious, bold, universal move to hand over administrative work to proletarians and semi-prolet-

-arians, will, however, rouse such unprecedented revolutionary enthusiasm among the people...that much that seemed impossible...will become possible for the millions, who will begin to work for themselves and not for the capitalists...105

Implicit in Lenin's discussion of the state and his argument in favour of proletarian revolution in Russia is a rejection of the orthodox conception of Marxism. Lenin advocated revolution even though the level of technological development in Russia did not seem adequate to generate a specifically capitalist contradiction with the existing property relations to all those Marxists who were trained in the Social Democratic tradition. His discussion of the state demonstrates a rejection of the narrow confines of the base/superstructure model of Marxism. By placing the emphasis on workers' control (i.e., the destruction of the 'natural' laws of motion of capitalism and their replacement with the self-conscious activity of the working class) rather than the alteration of forms of property relations, Lenin demonstrated a desire to go to the heart of the social relations of capitalist production, rather than merely tinker with a few isolated forms adopted by the capital relation. In general, his emphasis on the practical subjectivity of human beings as the authors and actors of history undercut the passive reliance of the Social Democrats upon the laws of history to gradually bring about the desired social change.

Lenin's State and Revolution stands as the sharpest reminder of the substance of his return to the theories of Marx. Constructed around Marx's libertarian analysis of the lessons of the Paris Commune, State and Revolution

--together with Lenin's subsequent struggles against the bureaucratization of the revolution¹⁰⁶-- are a stark contrast to Stalin's deliberate efforts to strengthen the Soviet state over the Russian working class.¹⁰⁷ Lenin joined Marx in insisting that the capitalist state had to be destroyed, a position that Stalin eventually found it convenient to reject, just as the Social Democrats had many years earlier.¹⁰⁸

Yet, for all this, there is in Lenin a certain philosophical ambivalence which is not yet evident in his practical political work. Even while his refurbished, and by then 'dialectical' theory allowed him to respond creatively to the February revolution (while the defenders of the Second International-style Marxist orthodoxy could not), Lenin never systematized his new theoretical perspectives as a public critique of Kautsky and the Marxism of the Social Democratic movement. Moreover, Lenin left essentially unchallenged the continued adherence of many prominent Bolsheviks (e.g. Bukharin) to the mechanical Marxism of the Second International.¹⁰⁹

In the long run, Lenin's activity and his writings proved inadequate to completely overturn the orthodox Marxism of the Second International. The resurgence of technicist Marxism in the form of Stalinism followed closely on the heels of the defeat of the European and Russian revolutions. Lenin's failure to systematize his theoretical break from orthodox Marxism was a serious omission. It allowed Stalin later to claim Lenin as a part of the technicist tradition, giving

credence to the unjustified claim that Marxism and Leninism both lead to Stalinism. Nevertheless, Lenin's work "does constitute, in the conditions he faced, something of a brief renaissance of the spirit of Marx's work."¹¹⁰

To conclude, there was no strain of technicism of Stalin's sort inherent in Marx's writings. In the case of Lenin, his early adherence to the technicist tradition of Marxism was jettisoned in the period after 1914. The tradition within which Stalin's theoretical work was done was not that of Marx and Lenin, but the tradition established by Engels and the Second International.

FOOTNOTES - APPENDIX

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2. see Mihailo Markovic's "Stalinism and Marxism," in Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation, ed. R. Tucker, W.W. Norton & Co., 1977, pages 301-302.
3. see Marx's "Preface" in Karl Marx: Economy, Class and Social Revolution, ed. by Z. Jordan, Nelson, 1971, pages 197-199.
4. see Marx's The German Ideology, Progress Publishers, 1976, page 62.
5. *ibid*, pages 36-37.
6. as cited in Franz Jakubowski's Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism, Allison and Busby, 1976, page 15.
7. *ibid*, page 23.
8. The German Ideology, page 98.
9. see Jakubowski, page 38.
10. see "Marx and Darwin: A Reconsideration," by Terrence Ball, in Political Theory, Vol. 7 No. 4, November 1979, pages 472-473.
11. *ibid*, pages 473-474.
12. see Anti-Duhring by Engels, International Publishers, 1966, and Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy by Engels, International Publishers, 1941.
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17. The German Ideology, page 45.
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21. ibid, page 99.
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23. ibid, page 49.
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25. cited in "Dialectics of Nature or Dialectics of Practice?", by Angus Taylor, in Dialectical Anthropology 4 (1979), page 303.
26. in The German Ideology, page 618.
27. ibid, pages 618-619.
28. see The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, by Shlomo Avineri, Cambridge University Press, 1968, page 67.
29. see Friedrich Engels, by David McLellan, The Viking Press, 1977, page 80.
30. Anti-Duhring, page 13.
31. see Terrell Carver's "Marx, Engels And Dialectics," in Political Studies, Vol. 28 #3, Paul Thomas's article "Marx and Science," in Political Studies, vol. 24 # 1, and Norman Levine's The Tragic Deception: Marx Contra Engels, Clio, 1975.
32. see Carver, page 363.
33. Thomas, pages 8 and 11.
34. The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism, pages 10-12.
35. Ludwig Feuerbach..., pages 21, and 25-27.
36. Anti-Duhring, page 13.
37. Schmidt, page 27 and McLellan, page 89.
38. see Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, by Engels, International Publishers, 1975, pages 45-46 and 48-49.

39. Ludwig Feuerbach..., pages 43-44
40. ibid, page 45.
41. see Jack Mendelson's "On Engels' Metaphysical Dialectics: A Foundation of Orthodox "Marxism," in Dialectical Anthropology 4 (1979), page 68.
42. cited in Schmidt, page 53.
43. ibid.
44. see McLellan, page 84.
45. ibid, page 86.
46. see Mendelson, page 67.
47. Schmidt, page 190.
48. ibid, pages 55-56.
49. McLellan, page 87.
50. Lichtheim, page 253.
51. The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism, pages 10-12.
52. ibid, page 333.
53. cited in ibid.
54. Schmidt, page 190.
55. ibid, page 53.
56. see Beliefs in Society, page 134.
57. see Marx and Engels Selected Correspondence, Progress Publishers, 1975, page 396.
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61. The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism, page 327.
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63. ibid, page 70-71.
64. see Colletti, page 19.
65. ibid.
66. ibid, page 20.
67. Schmidt, page 47.
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70. see Micheal Lowy's article "From Hegel to the Finland Station," in Critique #6, Spring 1976, page 9.
71. see Sawer, page 190.
72. Colletti, pages 65-66.
73. see " Critique of Political Economy, Historical Materialism and Pre-Capitalist Social Forms," by Micheal Harbsmeier, in Critique of Anthropology, vol.3 # 12, Summer 1978, page 6.
74. see John Molyneux's Marxism and the Party, Pluto Press, 1978, pages 72-73.
75. see Chris Harman's "Party and Class," in the book Party and Class, Pluto Press, n.d.
76. see Stephen F Cohen's essay "Bolshevism and Stalinism," in Stalinism:Essays in Historical Interpretation, op. cit., pages 3,4,10.
77. ibid, page 7
78. see "Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Party," by Duncan Hallas, in Party and Class, op. cit., pages 10-11.
79. ibid, page 12.
80. Cohen, page 12.
81. cited in Hallas, page 14.
82. Beliefs in Society, page 146.
83. see Marxism and Freedom, by Raya Dunayevskaya, Pluto Press, 1975, page 168.
84. See Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, by V I Lenin, Progress Publishers, 1970.
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86. see Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks, volume 38 of his Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1976.
87. see Dunayevskaya, page 171.
88. see Lowy's article, op.cit., and Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks, page 274
89. Philosophical Notebooks, page 358.
90. see Patterns of Soviet Thought, by Richard T DeGeorge, Ann Arbor, 1966, pages 177 & 210.
91. Lowy, page 11.
92. see Stalin, by Boris Souvraïne, Secker and Warburg, n.d., page 156.
93. Lowy, pages 7-8; also see Lenin, volumes I & II, by Tony Cliff, Pluto Press, 1975 and 1976.
94. see Lenin's Selected Works in three volumes, volume I, Progress Publishers, 1970, page 514.
95. Lowy, page 10.
96. see Tony Cliff's "Permanent Revolution," in International Socialism #61, June 1973, page 18.
97. see Cliff's Lenin, volume II, pages 97-139.
98. ibid, page 95.
99. ibid, pages 124-128.
100. see Cliff's Lenin, volume IV, Pluto Press, 1979, pages 2-3.
101. see Hal Draper's Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution: Volume II The Politics of Social Classes, Monthly Review Press, 1978, Chapters 7-11.
102. see E.H.Carr's The Bolshevik Revolution, volume I, Penguin, 1966, pages 96-97.
103. cited in Cliff's Lenin, volume II, page 328.
104. Cliff, Lenin, volume III, Pluto Press, 1978, pages 56-99.
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106. see Moshe Lewin's Lenin's Last Struggle, Vintage Books, 1970, and Cliff's Lenin, volume III, pages 3-4.

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