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THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN HISTORY ACCORDING TO
MARX AND ENGELS

by
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CHAPTER I

THE ROLE OF THE AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL IN HISTORY

The question of whether the average individual plays a role in history can be best answered by an analysis of Marx's and Engels' conception of history. The first questions to arise are: How is it possible that there are "laws" or patterns in history and that "men make their own history?" Or how can one conceive history as governed by "necessity" and simultaneously hold that the individual plays a role in history?

Marx and Engels lived at a time when the concept of "law of nature" was taken for granted. They regarded the social movement as "a process of natural history, governed by laws not only independent of human will, consciousness and intelligence, but rather, on the contrary, determining that will, consciousness and intelligence."¹ On the other hand, in our age, the concept of "laws of nature" operating in society has lost its simplicity and became one of the most controversial questions in the field of social sciences. Nevertheless one can not deny the existence of certain objective connections between social events. The relevant and fruitful question is not to question the existence of an objective

¹ Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I (London: William Glaiser, Ltd., 1909), p. xxviii.

pattern in history, but to see how Marx's pattern is conceived, and whether it limits the role of the individual in history.

We hold that the Marxian dialectic is indispensable for an understanding of Marx's conception of history. The dialectic is not only a tool for the analysis of socio-historical phenomena, but history itself according to Marx and Engels, has a dialectical pattern. Furthermore, the dialectic governs natural phenomena. It is, says Engels, "the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought."¹ However, the validity of applying the dialectic to nature is questionable.² The laws of the dialectic, according to Engels, are abstractions from the historical development of human society and nature. These laws are three in number:³

The Law of the negation of negation;

The Law of the interpenetration of opposites;

The Law of the transformation of quantity into quality.

¹ Frederick Engels, Anti-Duhring, Herr Eugen Duhring's Revolution in Science (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), p. 194.

² The application of the dialectic to nature implies its universality which reveals the Marxian quest for a "world outlook." It is this universal and ontological (Engels' claim, for instance, that contradiction is rooted in the very essence of things) character of the dialectic which makes it worthless. T.D. Weldon says that it is just like asserting that "everything is matter" or "everything is mind," for all are alike vacuous or empty since there is no way of proving them true or false. T.D. Weldon, The Vocabulary of Politics (Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth Middlesex, 1960), p. 137.

³ Frederick Engels, Dialectics of Nature (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), p. 63.

In order to be able to comprehend and analyse the dialectical laws we should examine Marx's and Engels' criticism of formal logic. Marx and Engels (following Hegel) depart from formal logic because they insist that within its categories a thing cannot both be and not be, cannot be at once itself and that which it is not. In other words, formal logic fits a static conception of reality. But to Marx and Engels the realm of the static is not the world of reality. Everything that is real is in a constant state of change, is in a state of "becoming." The actual real world never stands still, nor can man make it stand still except in his own mind, i.e. make abstractions about the real world. Reality, which is to Marx the phenomenal world of actual experience, is dynamic and evolutionary. Hence, to make the real world intellegible one should employ not only formal logic but also the dialectic, because the latter views the world dynamically.¹

Engels holds that the dialectic, in contrast to formal logic and "metaphysical" thought, can be described as the science of interconnections.² To illustrate this point, we will give examples which Engels and Marx, themselves, have offered. "Metaphysical" thought, says Engels, views the cause-effect relationship

¹ This is a criticism against both rationalists and empiricists. Although the latter consider formal logic as rules for intelligible discourse and contradiction as an attribute of propositions and not of things, Marx's criticism still holds because it questions the validity of applying a static tool, such as formal logic, to a dynamic reality.

² Engels, Dialectics of Nature, p. 63.

as a rigid antithesis. The "metaphysical" conception of the cause-effect relationship, which considers, for instance, a phenomenon x as having a cause y, never transcends the rigid one-way relationship between cause and effect. In other words, a "metaphysician" cannot conceive the possibility of having x as the cause of y which was itself the effect of y at an earlier period, because he is unable to think dynamically i.e. dialectically. Engels holds that the classical "metaphysical" conception of cause-effect relationship has a limited validity, especially when applied to a particular case as such. But when the particular case is viewed in its general connections with other phenomena, cause and effect constantly change places, and what is now or here an effect becomes there or then a cause, and vice versa.¹

Marx's method, which he calls "the advance from the abstract to the concrete,"² also illustrates the dialectical method of interconnections. For example, to analyze a given country from an economic standpoint, we begin with population, then analyze the latter's sub-divisions into classes, location, occupation in different branches of production; then we study its imports and exports, annual productional consumption, prices and commodities etc.... It seems correct, says Marx, to begin with population which is the basis of the entire productive activity of society, but on closer exa-

¹ Engels, Anti-Duhring, p. 36.

² Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1904), pp. 293-294.

mination it proves to be wrong. Population is an abstraction if we do not consider e.g. the classes of which it consists. Similarly these classes are abstractions unless we know their basis, such as wage-labour, capital etc. In the language of Marx any isolated part of a particular society is an abstraction, but we have to start with the abstract because it is of the nature of society or any whole that it cannot be studied as a whole. Thus we must begin with a tentatively isolated part. In order to comprehend the abstract or the part, however, we must examine other parts. As we extend our investigations and as the relationships which the part has to the whole or the concrete become clearer, we are compelled to modify our original judgements about the nature of the isolated part. Hence, this method involves a continual révision of our knowledge as it goes from part to part until the systematic nature of the whole is revealed.

So far, we have been viewing the dialectic from one perspective, namely, in contrast to formal logic and "metaphysical" thought. Our examples have shown that the dialectic implies the doctrines of change and interconnections. Now we will illustrate the dialectical laws themselves.

An illustration of the law of the negation of the negation (thesis, antithesis and synthesis), given by Marx, is the following:

"The capitalist mode of appropriation, the result of the

capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of negation."¹ In this example the negation of the capitalist property is a higher form than the thesis, namely, the pre-capitalist private property of the individual proprietor. If negation means only abolition and a return to the affirmation (thesis), there would be no development or progress in history. For progress is implied in the law of the negation of negation. "Contradiction" or negation is the law of progress in every society which contains antagonistic forces. These antagonistic social forces develop and exercise their impact upon one another until a solution is reached by the triumph of one of the antagonistic forces. Therefore, the key to the development of a society is to be found in its structural opposing elements. The strength and quality of interaction depends on the specific character of the opposing elements in society. Hence the future development of a particular society is rooted in the opposition, conflict and interaction of the elements within it. For instance the development of capitalist society depends, according to Marx and Engels, upon the stage of the development of its antagonistic forces - the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

¹ Marx, Capital, Vol. I, p. 789.

The second fundamental law of the dialectic, i.e., the law of the interpenetration of opposites, is illustrated by Marx's example in which he describes capitalist monopoly as the synthesis of feudal monopoly (thesis) and capitalist competition (antithesis). It is "the negation of feudal monopoly in so far as it implies the system of competition and the negation of competition in so far as it is monopoly."¹ This example illustrates the law of the interpenetration of opposites because capitalist monopoly contradicts competition and includes it in itself. This second law asserts that if we have a pattern consisting of successive negations, then each negation does not simply cancel the preceding stage, but, some of its elements are preserved and others are eliminated.

The application of the law of the transformation of quantitative changes into qualitative ones to socio-historical phenomena is worked out by Marx, for he observed that not every sum of money is transformable into capital. To make the transformation possible the possessor of commodities or money should have a certain large sum of money depending on the branch of industry and only then the employer becomes a capitalist. Then Marx adds "here, as in natural science, is shown the correctness of the law discovered by Hegel (in his 'logic'), that merely quantitative differences beyond a certain point pass into qualitative

¹ Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, no date), p. 145.

changes."¹ In other words, if we regard everything dynamically i.e. in a constant state of change; and if we regard things as interconnected, it follows that gradual change, at certain point, will involve different relations to connected things, that is to say, new "qualities."

Thus history according to Marx and Engels has a dialectical pattern, in the sense that its development and movement expresses dialectical laws. These laws, however, are merely general laws governing socio-historical phenomena. They are like scientific laws only in one respect, i.e., they express an "invariant character of a group of events."² In other words, socio-historical phenomena can be subsumed under these laws, because the latter are empirical generalizations about social and historical facts.

Although there is a dialectical pattern in history, we cannot deduce the development of a particular society from the general dialectical laws of history. Every historical epoch, according to Marx, has social and economic laws of its own, which are historical and specific, i.e., applying only to that particular epoch; and "as soon as society has outlived a given period of development, and is passing over from one given stage to another, it begins to be subject to other laws."³ Therefore, if one limits

¹ Marx, Capital, Vol. I, p. 296.

² Morris R. Cohen and Ernest Nagel, An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1934), p. 397.

³ Marx, Capital, Vol. I, p. xxviii.

his analysis to the general laws of the dialectic, without examining closely the specific forms which dialectical laws take while operating in a particular society at a certain stage of its social development, then his study would remain incomplete and unfruitful. An example of a scientific analysis of a specific historical epoch - taking England as the model - is Marx's Capital. In Capital Marx attempts to discover the "natural laws" of capitalist production, to lay bare the laws or tendencies "working with iron necessity towards inevitable results"¹ in capitalist society. ✓

To expose and analyze Marx's laws of social development is obviously beyond the scope of this thesis. However, our task is to show how these laws come into existence, and to what extent the average individual plays a role in the formation of these laws.

Engels correctly points out that there is a fundamental difference between Nature and history in that in the latter the agents are endowed with consciousness.² This difference between the two realms makes any attempt, we hold, of blurring the line of demarcation between natural and social sciences completely unwarranted. Although the course of history is governed by inner general laws, the latter are weaved by the actions of men. Millions of people act and interact and the outcome is history. Thus "necessity" is not a priori superimposed on history, but it is produced by the

¹ Ibid., p. xvii.

² Frederick Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., 1947), p. 56.

actions of men in the historical process itself. In unconscious nature laws which govern natural phenomena do not depend on the actions of men. While in history, the actions of men are part and parcel of historical phenomena; and through these actions that historical necessity is expressed and realized. In nature nothing happens which is "attained as a consciously desired aims," for there are only blind unconscious interacting forces out of whose interplay the general law emerges.¹ While in history the actors or agents, moved by a variety of motives, are consciously acting, aiming at definite goals. Nothing happens in history without human action, without a conscious goal, without an intended purpose. The consciously desired aims of the individuals make accident appear as reigning in history. But however the sumtotal and the resultant of the actions of millions of people in a particular society may come into conflict with the intentions of the actors. The individual wills may not realize what they want because their aims are incapable of realization, or the ends might come into conflict with one another leading to unintended consequences. Furthermore, even if the intended aims seem to be fulfilled, they may ultimately lead to consequences other than those intended. Thus what happens is, most of the time, at odds with the subjective intentions of the actors themselves. The historical event is the resultant of an innumerable interacting forces (the many individual

¹ Ibid.

wills), an "infinite series of parallelograms of forces." Each individual will is obstructed by all the others, and the outcome is seldom willed by any one. But the common resultant which emerges is not equal to zero. On the contrary, each individual will "contributes to the resultant and is to this degree involved in it."¹ Historical events thus appear to belong to the realm of accident or chance, but actually they are always governed by "inner, hidden laws and it is only a matter of discovering these laws."²

The laws in history are realized by the actions of men, but the motives behind these actions are of various kinds. The individual's action may be motivated by ambition, love of truth and justice, hatred, self-interest etc. However these multifarious motives are of secondary importance in relation to the consequences of men's actions because the latter seldom produce results coinciding with the intended aims.

Thus the actions of men in history rarely produce results envisaged by the actors themselves. In other words, the actors remain unconscious of the consequences of their actions. But if the actors are aware of the ultimate results of their actions (i.e. if they are aware of the laws which govern socio-historical phenomena), does this mean that necessity vanishes and that men can at will change the laws of history? Not at all. The mere conscious-

¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Correspondence: 1846-1895 (New York: International Publishers, 1942), pp. 476-471.

² Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach etc., p. 57.

ness of necessity does not alter the fact that history is governed by "necessity." Even in the "realm of freedom," i.e., the planned society of the Socialist epoch, history moves according to a pattern weaved by the actions of men. "Freedom" in this context does not mean the negation of "necessity" or the laws of history, but to use these laws with full understanding, i.e., to master them by man. Freedom is the consciousness of necessity. This consciousness will make man the master of his social organization; not in the sense that he can, at will, change his social system, but in the sense that man will make his own history with full consciousness - "only from that time will the social causes set in movement by him have, in the main and in a constantly growing measure, the results intended by him."¹ Therefore, freedom consists in the correspondence of the intentions, aims and goals of men with the objective results or consequences of their actions. The discrepancy between man's intended results and the objective consequences of his actions (the laws of history) made the latter appear as "laws of nature" foreign to man, and as extraneous objective forces dominating and ruling man. For example in capitalist society men, the producers of commodities, become ruled by them. The products of men's labour assume, in the form of commodities, an independent form above and against the producers. This is possible because commodities mystify the social relations between producers and

¹ Engels, Anti-Duhring, p. 389.

give them the appearance of relations between things. This process of mystification or reification is called by Marx "Fetishism."¹

Therefore, according to Marx and Engels, there is no contradiction between the concept of "blind laws" operating in society and that "men make their own history" because the results of men's actions cannot be explained by their subjective intentions but "only by objective necessities which their actions realize, whilst they believe themselves to be acting freely."²

Marx's statement: "men make their own history," does not refer to a special group of privileged or prominent individuals whose actions realize the laws of history. On the contrary, millions of people are involved in the "making" of history. Every individual in society, even the average individual "makes" history: his relationship to production and exchange of things produced determine his role in the "making" of history. The materialist conception of history, says Engels, starts from the proposition that forces of production and the corresponding relations of production are the basis of all social structure. From this point of view, adds Engels, "the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions" are to be sought in changes in the mode of production and the social relations of production.³ Thus, this very

¹ Marx, Capital, Vol. I, p. 43.

² Rudolf Schlesinger, Marx, His Time and Ours (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1950), pp. 91-92.

³ Engels, Anti-Duhring, p. 365.

conception of history makes it clear that the role of the average individual in history has to be viewed through his relationships to the process of production and to other men.

Men's action on the forces of production (i.e., the resources offered by Nature which do not embody any human labour; the useful instruments of production and commodities that are the result of past labour, i.e., tools and instruments of labour; and the power of human labour itself including manual and mental labour, and in it is embodied the acquired knowledge and skill which is the legacy of the labour of past generations) for the satisfaction of their basic needs such as food, drink, sex, habitation etc., indirectly constitutes their role in history. ^{But} the mere fact that they are involved in the production of material life, that is, the means for the satisfaction of their needs, they are indirectly and unconsciously "making" history. For this very process of the production of the means of subsistence determines men's specific relationships to the process of production which in turn depends on the level or the stage of the development of the forces of production i.e. the particular mode of production such as Feudalism, Capitalism etc., corresponding to the stage of the development of the forces of production. There are specific relationships between men and men which Marx calls the social relations of production. These relations regulate the rights to and obligations towards, the use of the available means of production, and to other men. "The relations of production," says Marx, "in their

totality constitute what are called the social relations, society, and, specifically, a society at a definite stage of historical development."¹ Therefore, the social relations of production are not merely the relations in the workshop, but they comprise the relations between men and men in the whole social system i.e. the relations between producers and non-producers within the workshop; the relations between producers and non-producers with respect to, the exchange of products, and the ownership and control of the means of production.

Men are not free in choosing the forces of production and consequently the corresponding social relations of production. Each generation exploits the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding ones.² And if there has been no transition from one epoch to another, then each generation carries on its productive activity with the existing social relations of production. In the process of social production, says Marx, men enter into definite relations with other men "that are indispensable and independent of their will."³ But although men cannot "make" their history just as they like i.e., they do not make it under conditions freely chosen by themselves, their productive activity makes history in the sense that the cumulative productive

¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), Vol. I, p. 90.

² Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), p. 59.

³ Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, p. 11.

activity of many generations will slowly modify the circumstances i.e. the existing forces of production develop, and at a certain point of their development a qualitative change takes place i.e. a new historical epoch emerges from the womb of the old society.

✓ The "making" of history is not done by millions of atomized individuals moved by their subjective motives. Nor the development of the productive forces and the transition from one epoch to another are realized by the actions of atomized individuals. Actually, the assumed atomization of the individual actors is a myth. And the "ideal" motives of individuals are not the ultimate driving forces of history. ✓

✓ This brings ^{us} to the notion of class which is of paramount importance in the materialist conception of history. Classes are regarded, by Marx and Engels, as the link between the objective social relations of production and the human action by which a mode of production is preserved or transformed. ✓

On the one hand, classes express the objective social relations of production; and thus, the individuals in a particular society belong to classes due to their specific material conditions and social relations which create common situations and common interests. The class achieves an independent power over and against the individuals who compose it, and makes their life predetermined, their position and personal development assigned

to them.¹ Even the individual's sentiments, modes of thought, and views of life are derived, through tradition and education, from his class. It is the latter which creates out of its material conditions an entire superstructure from which the individual derives his ideas, although he imagines that "they form the real motives and the starting point of his activity."²

On the other hand, classes are the ultimate driving forces in history. The materialist conception of history, says Engels, recognizes "ideal driving forces," but it goes further by investigating the ultimate driving forces which lie behind the immediate motives, and searches for the "historical causes which transform themselves into these motives in the brains of the actors."³ These driving forces are to be sought in history itself and not to be taken from a "philosophical ideology" (like Hegel's) and impose them on history. To discover the ultimate driving forces of history which - consciously or unconsciously - lie behind the motives of men in their historical actions is the "only path which can put us on the track of the laws holding sway both in history as a whole, and at particular periods and in particular lands."⁴ In earlier periods, Engels holds, the discovery of these ultimate

¹ Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 69.

² Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (New York: International Publishers, no date), p. 41.

³ Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach etc., p. 57.

⁴ Ibid., p. 59.

driving causes of history was impossible because of the complicated and concealed relationships between them and their effects. But in modern times, i.e. since the Industrial Revolution and especially since the establishment of large-scale industry, it has been discovered that the apparent political struggles in England, for instance, are actually struggles between two classes: the landed aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. And since 1830 the working class, the proletariat has been recognized as a third force in the struggles, at least, in the most advanced countries: England and France.¹

If the driving forces of history are classes, then the key to the development and eventual transformation of an existing mode of production lies in class analysis. The assertion that human history is the history of class struggle² necessarily means that the members of a class are more or less aware of their conflicting interests with the members of the opposing class. As Rudolf Schlesinger correctly noticed that: "Whatever the intentions of the small craftsman opposing the powerful merchant... it is only the existence of some intentions opposed to those of his opposite number in the economic relation, which makes it possible to describe the latter as a struggle."³ However history should not be

¹ Ibid., pp. 59-60.

² With the exception of the primitive communal and the Socialist epochs.

³ Rudolf Schlesinger, op.cit., p. 18.

described only in terms of class struggles. The Marxian conception of class is not merely dynamic, for it has static aspects. The ruling class with its obvious interest in maintaining the established order, is a class. And in an order where the power of the ruling class is uncontested, it is sheer mysticism to analyze the given society in terms of "class struggle." Moreover, not all political struggles in a particular society can be described as class struggles, except if one reduces the concept of class to cover all the sectional conflicts within a class which certainly was not Marx's intention. The conception of history as that of class struggle, we hold, applies only to revolutionary and transitional periods which form short episodes in the history of mankind. Nevertheless, the explanation of revolutionary upheavals in terms of class would be impossible unless class could be described as the predominant factor during the pre-revolutionary periods.¹

Not all classes in a particular epoch can be considered as driving forces in history. For example, in capitalist society the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are the main classes, although the landed aristocracy will remain a significant independent class for a certain time, but it will eventually merge with the capitalist class (taking England as the model of capitalist society). Marx describes other classes e.g. the petty bourgeoisie as a

¹ Ibid., p. 224.

"transitional class," and the lumpen-proletariat as the "dangerous class," the "social scum."¹ These classes are historically insignificant both as loci of power and as levers of change. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie is the locus of power in capitalist society, i.e., where social and political power lies. The proletariat is the lever of change i.e. the revolutionary class which will overthrow the capitalist mode of production and replace it with the socialist mode of production.

But this does not mean that whenever there is an oppressed class it is possible to derive its propensity to act as a lever of change. Even if it forms the main existent productive force, we cannot deduce its propensity to revolutionary action leading to a fundamental transformation of society: neither the ancient slaves, nor the medieval serfs could produce more than negative results in their revolts and class struggles. The existence of an oppressed class indicates, at most, the necessity of an ultimate revolutionary upheaval in society which would lead to its emancipation and the emergence of a new society. The question of whether a particular class is a revolutionary class i.e. in it are the germs of a new society which it would eventually establish, depends on the specific material conditions which would determine its role in history. The role of the proletariat in history, says

¹ Marx and Engels, Selected Works, Vol. I, p. 44.

Marx, depends on "what the proletariat is, and what, consequent on that being, it will be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is irrevocably predetermined by its own life situation as well as in the whole organization of contemporary bourgeois society."¹

In conclusion we can fairly say that the role of the average individual in history, according to Marx and Engels, boils down to his role in the exploitation of the forces of production which are handed down from past generations, together with its corresponding social relations of production which find their specific expression in the class phenomenon. If the role of the individual is viewed statically, then he "makes" history under conditions and relations which are not freely chosen by him i.e. he is cast into a situation which he himself has not made. These historical conditions determine his present and subsequent role in history, but they are themselves the result of human action, i.e., they have been made by past generations. In other words, the role of the individual is the product of history, i.e., the product of his ancestors' actions. Thus the individual's role in history is "determined" by the conditions under which it is played. Hence, at every stage of historical development, there is a general "determinism" which prescribes the role of the individual. It

¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Critique (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956), p. 53.

is not a "determinism" which is a priori superimposed on history, i.e. super-historical, for it is, itself, the product of human action. ✓

On the other hand, if the role of the individual in history is viewed dynamically, then his activity which is "determined" by historical conditions changes those conditions as a consequence of playing his role. As Marx and Engels put it: "Circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances."¹ Similarly in the third Theses on Feuerbach, Marx expresses the same idea: "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing.... forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator himself."² In other words, the relationship between the role of the average individual in history and the "given" historical conditions is dialectical: The historical conditions "determine" the individual's role, but through the individual's action the historical conditions themselves are changed, and these changed conditions lead to a change in the individual's role itself.

Moreover, the average individual exercises his activity as a member of a particular class. Classes form part and parcel of the historical conditions which each generation inherits from its predecessor. The role of the average individual in history results

¹ Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 50.

² Ibid., pp. 651-652.

in the modification or development of the historical conditions (including classes), but the development is slow, gradual and imperceptible except during transitional and revolutionary periods. In such periods, the social relations of production become fetters on the forces of production; revolution becomes imminent; and a revolutionary class emerges as the main antagonist of the established ruling class, as the lever of change to a new historical epoch which has developed in the womb of the old society and which the cumulative productive activity of the average individual has prepared for it. In such revolutionary periods, the "making" of history through the productive roles of the average individuals is overshadowed by the role of the revolutionary class whose members are "making" history, more directly, significantly, and, quite often, more consciously. ✓

CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL THINKER IN HISTORY

The role of the thinker or the ideologist in history is contingent upon whether ideas can influence the course of history. To Marx and Engels, thought itself is rooted in the socio-economic conditions of society (i.e. the forces of production and the corresponding social relations of production) which constitute the bases of the materialist conception of history. Ideas are produced by men in conformity with their social relations.¹ This leads us to Marx's conception of ideology in the broader sense of the word, i.e., identified with "superstructures,"² which is thought as conditioned by the material facts of social life. The mode of production together with the social relations determine the general character of the superstructures, such as, politics, law, religion, philosophy etc.... "It is not the consciousness of men which determine their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness."³

The materialist conception of history considers the "rela-

¹ Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, p. 105.

² The narrower conception of ideology is identified with "false consciousness," that is to say, distorted representation of socio-economic relations and conflicts.

³ Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, pp. 11-12.

tions of production," that is the socio-economic relations which men enter in the process of production, as the essential element in determining the causes of social and historical events. On the other hand, the "idealist" conception regards ideas as the dominant forces of history. It describes socio-economic conflicts in terms of the religious, philosophical, political, legal and similar forms, i.e. ideological forms in which men become conscious of them and fight them out.¹ The mechanism by which the "idealist" historian forms his conception of history, involves three steps: first, the ideas are divorced from their social and historical foundations and hence, history is always under the sway of ideas; second, ideas are connected and arranged in an orderly manner which is possible by virtue of their connected material basis; and finally the conclusion is that the "thinkers," the "philosophers" and the "ideologists" have been always dominant, and, hence, they are the real "makers" and "manufacturers" of history.² Marx's and Engels' criticism of the "idealist" conception of history, is that it hypostatizes ideas and that it does not analyze the causes which underly the "ideal" forces in history. The difference between the "materialist" and the "idealist" interpretations of history does not lie in the recognition of the existence and effectiveness of

¹ Ibid., p. 12.

² Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 63.

ideological forces but in the explanation of their origin.¹ Everything that moves men to action, says Engels, has to pass through their minds,² i.e., the ideas prevailing in their brains immediately determine their actions. Thus, the explanation of men's actions from their thoughts instead from their material relations leads to the idealistic conception of history. "Idealist" historians who see only the political actions of princes and states, religious and all other kinds of theoretical struggles, share, with each historical epoch, the illusion of that epoch.³ For instance, if an epoch believes itself to be actuated by purely political or religious motives, although politics or religion is only the form or the "ideological" facade of the true motives, the "idealist" historian accepts this illusion.

The materialist interpretation of history does not imply that men are moved by material interests. These material interests simply give rise to certain ideas which may prevent or inspire human action, and only in this sense, they influence history. "Ideal"⁵ according to Marx and Engels, are not interpreted as basically opposed to material interests. "Ideals originated at some stage, present or past, from direct generalisations of material

¹ Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach, etc., p. 58.

² Ibid., p. 35.

³ Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 51.

interests, or from generalisations from other ideas the origin of which can be ultimately derived from Man's desire to understand Nature, and to improve his conditions of life."¹

The effectiveness of ideas in history is asserted by Marx as early as 1843 in his Introduction to A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. The criticism of existing society by material force, says Marx, cannot be replaced by theoretical criticism, but that theory itself becomes a material force once it inspires the masses.² And later in his Theses on Feuerbach (1845), Marx asserts that "the question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question."³ This indicates that Marx regarded thought as having a practical function, hence, it plays a role in moulding the social conditions of life. The propensity of ideology to change social and historical conditions is regarded by Marx as one of its possible functions, and thereby proves its "truth" as well as its foundation in the social and historical conditions of

¹ Rudolf Schlesinger, op.cit., p. 45.

² Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, On Religion (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, no date), p. 50.

³ Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 645.

the age whose problems it attempts to solve. In the third thesis on Feuerbach, Marx argues against Robert Owen, who regarded human action as dependent on circumstances and upbringing, by stating that the "educator must himself be educated." Thus, the power of ideologies to mould the ideas of men and their attitudes, and consequently their historical actions, is explicitly asserted by Marx.

Before we deal with how the various ideological spheres (politics, law, religion, philosophy etc.) influence the course of history, we should start with an analysis of the general mechanisms of ideological development. In consequence of the social division of labour, ideologies are developed by specialized bodies of men whose minds work with the thought-content of a specific sphere, and who defend the position of that sphere, and preserve its continuity and consistency, and always have the illusion to be working in an independent field. Lawyers explain the needs of their society in terms of abstract principles, and imagine that they are dealing with a priori principles of law derived from its previous development, whereas they are merely socio-economic "reflexes."¹ Theologians deal with thought, the origins of which go back to the primitive animistic conception of the world and which has developed through the formation of national religions, the establishment of Christianity which came into being out of a

¹ Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence, p. 482.

"mixture of generalized oriental, particularly Jewish, theology and vulgarized Greek, particularly stoic, philosophy,"¹ and its consequent developments culminating in the formation of the medieval church, and later the emergence of Protestantism with the growth of a bourgeoisie. Philosophers work with thought-material handed down to them by their predecessors, and are influenced by the socio-economic conditions of society indirectly, through political, legal, and ethical ideologies which fall under the philosophers' systems. "Here economy creates nothing absolutely new, but it determines the way in which the existing material of thought is altered and further developed."² This concept of Engels asserts that changes in the socio-economic conditions cause changes in the social and historical functions of existing ideas. Such a statement implies that the relationship between socio-economic conditions and ideology is not automatic, i.e., whenever we have changes in the conditions, this would result in the emergence of new ideas. On the contrary, the ideas prevailing in an earlier epoch could serve the present historical epoch by changing their social function through re-interpretation by the ideologists of the existing social order.

The ideologist, according to Engels, accomplishes his work consciously, but with a false consciousness. That is to say, the

¹ Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach, etc., p. 66.

² Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence, pp. 483-484.

the real motives which lie behind his dealing with the conceptual material of his specific field, remain unknown to him. He is unaware that his material life conditions ultimately determine the course of the ideological process itself. "He works with mere thought material which he accepts without examination as the product of thought, he does not investigate further for a more remote process independent of thought; indeed its origin seems obvious to him, because as all action is produced through the medium of thought it also appears to him to be ultimately based upon thought."¹ When the ideologist deals with history, he deals with the thought material of the different spheres which has formed out of the thought of the past generations and which has undergone a series of developments in the minds of the different thinkers throughout the ages. But although material facts may have exercised an influence on these developments, there is always an implicit presupposition that these material facts themselves are the fruits of a process of thought, and so material facts are incorporated successfully in the realm of thought.

If Marx and Engels deny that the ideological spheres have an independent history, then this does not mean that they deny that the various ideological spheres have no effect upon history. Ideologies have no independent history because they should not be viewed in isolation from their material basis. Otherwise, the

¹ Ibid., p. 511.

material substructure of society is affected or influenced by the various superstructures (political, legal, religious etc.).

Although the state, according to Engels, is "on the whole only a reflex, in comprehensive form, of the economic need of the class controlling production,"¹ it can react upon the socio-economic conditions. The interaction of the socio-economic substructure and the state (political power) is that of unequal forces. The former, being the stronger force, gets its way but "it has also to suffer reactions from the political movement which it established and endowed with relative independence itself."² The reaction of the state upon the socio-economic development i.e. the role of political ideology in influencing the course of history, can be one of three kinds: it can run in the same direction, and thus enhancing the socio-economic development; it can oppose the line of development, but however its opposition can only retard the development because in the long run political power can not change the direction of the socio-economic development i.e. the fundamental course of history; or "it can cut off the economic development from certain paths, and impose on it certain others."³ Obviously in the last two cases the state can do damage to the socio-economic development and result in the waste

¹ Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach, etc., p. 62.

² Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence, p. 480.

³ Ibid., p. 481.

of great masses of energy and material. State action may either retard or accelerate the socio-economic development through tariffs, free trade, good or bad fiscal system. Legislation, also, is cited by Engels as a political act which influences the socio-economic development.¹

Closely connected with the political superstructure is the legal superstructure. The latter, according to Marx and Engels is not a mere reflection of the socio-economic relations, but it reacts on the socio-economic sphere. For instance, laws may enhance the centralisation of capital and the predominance of the factory system such as the English factory acts. These factory legislations helped to destroy the ancient and the transitional forms behind which capital is partly concealed and replaces them by the open and direct dominance of capital. Factory legislation enforced uniformity, order and regularity but at the same time increased the anarchy and the catastrophes of the capitalist system. And by the destruction of the small and domestic industries it destroys the last resort of the "redundant" population." "By maturing the material conditions, and the combination on a social scale of the processes of production, it matures the contradictions and antagonisms of the capitalist form of production, and thereby provides, along with the elements for the formation of a new society, the forces for exploding

¹ Ibid., p. 484.

the old one."¹ Engels holds that laws influence the socio-economic basis and may within certain limits modify it; and he gives the example of the law of inheritance whose basis is socio-economic, but for instance the different status of the testator in England in contrast to France can not be traced only to socio-economic courses. However both of these different forms of the law of inheritance influence the socio-economic sphere because they influence the division of property.² The reaction of laws on the socio-economic substructure can have only a limited effectiveness. They cannot change or influence the general character and direction of the development of the socio-economic conditions. They can not run against the socio-economic current. The English Factory Acts, Marx pronounces, are "just as much the necessary product of modern industry as cotton yarn, self-actors, and electric telegraph." Laws not based on the socio-economic conditions remain ineffective. French laws attempt to perpetuate small division of land. But this attempt is in vain because "inspite of these laws land ownership is concentrating again." On the other hand the laws in England gain a socio-economic importance because they perpetuate large landed property which is in harmony with the prevailing system of production.³

¹ Marx, Capital, Vol. I, p. 512.

² Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence, p. 482.

³ Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, p. 289.

Thus, we can fairly conclude that ideologies, according to Marx and Engels, influence the course of history because they can act upon the socio-economic substructure which forms the basis of history. Although ideologies have their origin in the material conditions of man, i.e., in his relations to Nature and to other men in the process of production itself, they are dialectically related to their material basis. To put ^{it} differently, those which are, ultimately, the effects of the material life conditions can react upon their causes, in such a manner, that the latter become their effects. In other words, the relationship between the substructure and the superstructure is not a rigid one-way cause-effect relationship, but a dialectical one.

After showing that ideological forces affect the course of history, our task is to find out how the individual thinker plays a role in history. In other words, how the thinker's ideas, consciously or unconsciously, influence historical development? Or what are the historical non-ideological conditions which make his ideas effective in history?

To Marx and Engels, the individual thinker is the apparent producer of ideas. But he develops them out of the thought-material of past generations, and, consciously or unconsciously, in response to his material life-conditions. Nevertheless, only the individual is capable of thinking, and there is no "collective" mind (i.e. a metaphysical entity) which thinks over and above the heads of the indi-

vidual thinkers. But on the other hand, it is sheer mysticism to hold that his ideas and sentiments have their origin in him alone, i.e., they can be explained solely on the basis of his own individual life experience. Thought, according to Marx and Engels should be comprehended in relation to its socio-historical conditions, hence neither abstract men nor isolated individuals do the thinking, but men in their specific "social relations" who have developed a particular mode of thought in conformity with these relations.¹ Karl Mannheim holds that it is incorrect to say that the single individual thinks, rather it is more correct to say that "he participates in thinking further what other men have thought before him;" and, thus, every individual is, in a two-fold manner, predetermined by the fact that he lives in society: on the one hand a "given" material situation and on the other hand a given mode of thought.²

Therefore, according to Marx and Engels, the existence of isolated individual thinkers, who are severed from their material conditions, is a myth, although an "isolated" thinker may have the impression that his ideas are independent from his socio-historical conditions. But, according to Marx and Engels, the proper method for the understanding of the individual's ideas is not to take the individual's opinion about himself, but through the indirect method of analyzing his socio-

¹ Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, p. 105.

² Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1960), p. 3.

vidual thinkers. But on the other hand, it is sheer mysticism to hold that his ideas and sentiments have their origin in him alone, i.e., they can be explained solely on the basis of his own individual life experience. Thought, according to Marx and Engels should be comprehended in relation to its socio-historical conditions, hence neither abstract men nor isolated individuals do the thinking, but men in their specific "social relations" who have developed a particular mode of thought in conformity with these relations.¹ Karl Mannheim holds that it is incorrect to say that the single individual thinks, rather it is more correct to say that "he participates in thinking further what other men have thought before him;" and, thus, every individual is, in a two-fold manner, predetermined by the fact that he lives in society: on the one hand a "given" material situation and on the other hand a given mode of thought.²

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¹ Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, p. 105.

² Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1960), p. 3.

economic conditions.¹

We have seen in the first chapter that classes, according to Marx and Engels, are loci of power and levers of change. Hence, the effective role of the individual thinker in history is to express - consciously or unconsciously, the needs of the class which is interested in either maintaining or changing the existing socio-economic order, in non-revolutionary and revolutionary periods respectively. Utopian (in Mannheim's sense²) thinkers play a role in history because the "Utopias of today may become the realities of tomorrow." Obviously, Marx's conception of the classless and stateless society of the Socialist epoch is, at least, utopian in that sense. But a distinction should be made between relative and absolute utopia. The former is realizable in another order than the existing one, while the latter is completely unrealizable in any order.³

Every ascendent class needs a utopian element (in Mannheim's sense) to overthrow the existing obsolete society. For instance, the utopia of the rising bourgeoisie was centered around the idea of "freedom." It was in part a real utopia, in the sense that it contained elements aiming at the realization of a new socio-economic order and which were instrumental in breaking down the old feudal

¹ Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, p. 12.

² Mannheim asserts that: "a state of mind is utopian when it is incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs." op.cit., p. 173.

³ Ibid., p. 177.

society. Moreover, freedom in the sense of bursting asunder the bonds of the guild and caste systems, in the sense of freedom of thought, opinion, participation in political matters and the freedom of the development of the individual became, to a large extent, a realizable possibility.¹ Whether the revolutionary ideology (in Marx's sense) contains unrealizable utopian elements is not directly relevant to the role of the individual thinker in history. If the ideas of an established ruling class or a revolutionary class are imbued with some "ideological" and unrealizable utopian elements, then this does not render them completely ineffective. For example, the ideas of the French Encyclopaedists and of Marx and Engels themselves, contained such elements, but their effective role in assisting the French bourgeoisie and the Russian proletariat respectively, to seize power, can not be denied. Nevertheless we would have an affective and a realizable utopia "only when the utopian conception of the individual seizes upon currents already present in society and gives expression to them."² In other words, the creative power of the individual thinkers is not denied, but if it has no contact with the problems arising from the existing socio-economic conditions then it remains ineffective and impotent in relation to history.

¹ Ibid., p. 183.

² Ibid., p. 187.

Marx doubts whether the individual thinker is able to produce a utopia which may become a reality in the future, if the class which acts as a lever of change is not yet sufficiently developed to constitute itself as a class and the productive forces are not yet sufficiently developed in the bosom of existing society, to enable the thinkers to catch a glimpse of the material conditions necessary for the emancipation of the oppressed class, and for the formation of a new society. Hence, according to Marx and Engels, a theory is a function of reality, and it is more or less utopian, ^(unrealizable) depending on the stage of development of reality (material conditions) itself. But before reaching that stage of development, the thinkers would remain "utopians who, to meet the wants of the oppressed classes, improvise systems and go in search of a regenerating science. But in the measure that history moves forward, and with it the struggle of the proletariat assumes clearer outlines, they no longer need to seek science in their minds; they have only to take note of what is happening before their eyes and to become its mouth-piece."¹

Marx and Engels consider themselves that they are merely the theoreticians of the oppressed class (proletariat) which has in its hands the power to bring about a revolutionary upheaval which would result in the formation of a new society. While on the other hand

¹ Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, p. 120.

the French philosophers of the eighteenth century who prepared men's minds for the coming revolution (which they did not envisage) never claimed that they represented a particular class but all humanity. They lacked the historical perspective, for instead of defending the needs of the rising class, viz., the bourgeoisie, they appealed to eternal reason, right, truth, equality but that was merely on the level of thought, while in practice, i.e., the realization of their ideas did not produce the kingdom of reason. Their kingdom was merely the idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisie; their eternal right was actually in practice bourgeois justice; their conception of equality was reduced to bourgeois equality before the law; and their government of reason "came into being, and only could come into being, as a democratic bourgeois republic."¹ Thus, Engels says: "the great thinkers of the eighteenth century could, no more than their predecessors, go beyond the limits imposed upon them by their epoch."² Similarly the utopian socialists like Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen did not claim to emancipate a particular class but all humanity. They did not consider socialism as a product of historical development and as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat but as an expression of absolute truth, reason and justice. Thus it is a mere "accident when and where it is discovered." It

¹ Engels, Anti-Duhring, p. 29.

² Ibid.

needs only the individual man of genius to discover it. "He might just as well have been born 500 years earlier, and might then have spared humanity 500 years of error, strife, and suffering."¹ In contrast to utopian socialists, Marx and Engels rejected the normative conception of socialism which is not rooted in the historical process itself. "Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence."²

In conclusion we hold that according to Marx and Engels the role of the individual thinker in history amounts to the effectiveness of his ideas in preserving or changing the existing social order. There are two ways of realizing his effective role. On the one hand he may directly or indirectly and consciously or unconsciously represent the interests of either an established or a revolutionary class and thus influence the course of history. For example, Rousseau and the French Encyclopaedists, more or less, influenced the course of history in this manner. In such a case the consequences of the "realization" of his ideas might be contrary to what he himself believed (e.g. the application of Marx's ideas in the Soviet Union

¹ Ibid., p. 31.

² Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 47.

led to consequences which are entirely alien to Marx's doctrines, such as, the dehumanization and degradation of the individual - the aim of society is that of an ever-increasing consumption instead of the development of the individual personality), but the thinker should not be blamed, since "no man should be held entirely responsible for what posterity makes of his thought."¹

On the other hand, the individual thinker may influence the course of history in a more effective way. His theory might find its realization in his life-time. Its fulfilment, which is not possible except if it fulfils the needs of a certain class, changes the existing conditions. The change in the actual material situation, brought about by action, gives rise to a new theory. Thus the theory is dialectically related to practice which is guided by theory, but it changes the latter by changing the conditions which have given rise to the theory. But in so far as the individual thinker participates in actual practice, he ceases to be a mere thinker, for his role becomes, more or less, identical with the role of the great individual in history.

¹ Henry B. Mayo, Introduction to Marxist Theory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 205.

CHAPTER III

THE ROLE OF THE GREAT INDIVIDUAL IN HISTORY

The materialist conception of history is "deterministic," in the ^{loose} sense that every event has a cause or causes and could not be different from what it is unless something in the cause or causes had also been different. The principle of causality is a necessary condition for the understanding of social and historical phenomena, and it underlies every intelligible conception of history. Without such an assumption scientific inquiry in the fields of social sciences and history, is impossible. Thus, "determinism" in this sense, is implied in every scientific investigation.

But the materialist conception of history goes further and asserts that history expresses a pattern. This pattern of historical development is revealed, according to Marx and Engels when one takes the mode of production and the corresponding relations of production as the basis of history. Thus, as E.H. Carr correctly points out that, the historian can not be but selective in choosing his facts.¹ Moreover, every historical event contains an element of interpretation, and thus history ceases to be an objective compilation of facts. The historian chooses his facts according to his standard

¹ Edward Hallit Carr, What is History? (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), p. 9.

of historical significance and explains them according to his hierarchy of causes.

The "necessity" which governs history and which is weaved by the actions of men, is not incompatible with free will. Plekhanov claims that freedom and necessity become identical in one's mind, when the lack of free will presents itself "in the form of the complete subjective and objective impossibility of acting differently," and when simultaneously, one's actions are "the most desirable of all other possible actions."¹ But such a claim is untenable because the free will and necessity operate on two different levels. The level of free will is that of the unhistorical events which might become historical facts when great individuals participate in them, but even in that case they will remain in the realm of "accident" or "chance," i.e., they cannot be explained historically because of the historian's inability to fit them into his pattern of rational explanation and interpretation. While the level of "necessity" is that of historical events which are the resultants of the actions of many individuals. The consciousness of necessity is not freedom in the sense that it is a result of the individual's free will. To Marx and Engels, we hold, freedom as the consciousness of necessity does not mean, as Plekhanov thinks, that if one is aware of the "necessity" which governs history, then

¹ George Plekhanov, The Role of the Individual in History (New York: International Publishers, 1940), p. 16.

he becomes free. It is sheer mysticism to claim that one is free in relation to "laws" of history if he is merely conscious of them. Marx and Engels would never entertain the idea that if a serf of the medieval feudal epoch, for instance, is aware of the "laws" of his historical epoch, then he is free. Freedom as the consciousness of necessity pertains only to the socialist epoch because in it, according to Marx and Engels, man can become the master of his social organization i.e. he enters the realm of freedom, not due to the "philosophic" discovery that freedom is the consciousness of necessity, but because the level of the forces of production makes it possible for man to socialize the means of production, to do away with commodity production, and replace anarchy in social production by planned and conscious organization. "Freedom," says Marx, "consists in socialized 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; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature."¹

The only modicum of truth which the statement "freedom is 'identical' with necessity" contains, is that human actions are both free and determined according to the point of view from which one regards them. For example, if an individual voluntarily commits

¹ Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. III (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), p. 800.

suicide, then his action is free in so far it was not caused by some external compulsion i.e. it was not an act which fits in the pattern of historical "necessity" for instance; but on the other hand his action was the culmination of a series of caused developments in his personal life. From this latter perspective his action can be considered as determined: poverty might be a cause, or failure in a love affair, or affliction with an incurable disease etc. Thus, the same action viewed from different perspectives makes it appear as both free and determined. But such an interpretation of the so-called "identity between freedom and necessity" was certainly not part of Plekhanov's intentions. To Plekhanov "freedom and necessity are identical" in the realm of historical facts where the individual's free actions become the conscious and free expression of necessity."¹ Such an assertion is mere juggling with words. Plekhanov reminds us of the German idealist thinkers (whom Marx and Engels criticized in The German Ideology), when he says that: "until the individual has won this freedom (i.e. the consciousness of necessity) by heroic effort in philosophical thinking he does not fully belong to himself."² In other words, if the individual knocks out of his head the philosophical idea of dualism (i.e. the separation between the subject and the object, between freedom and necessity) then he serves

¹ George Plekhanov, The Role of the Individual in History, p. 18.

² Ibid.

as an instrument of necessity and hence he is free.

The existence of a pattern in history raises the question of whether it leads to the elimination of the notion of individual responsibility in history. Isaiah Berlin holds that if history is "determined," then individual responsibility vanishes, and to praise or blame this or that individual becomes an absurd activity.¹ To Marx and Engels, there is a realm of "freedom" within which the individual can be blamed or praised. This realm of freedom is distinct from the realm of "necessity" where laws of history operate and where the individual can not be regarded as responsible for their effects. We cannot blame the individual for being tall, or for the colour of his hair, or the qualities of mind. Similarly we cannot blame the capitalist for his inability to provide employment for the workers in an economic depression. We cannot blame individuals for the economic depression of the 1930's nor for the disintegration of feudal society because nobody willed them. We cannot pass judgment on the slave-owner in Periclean Athens, for instance, because he did not "make" the institution of slavery. But this does not prevent us from condemning a slave-owning society. Marx holds that the individual cannot be made "responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them."²

¹ Isaiah Berlin, Historical Inevitability (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 26.

² Marx, Capital, Vol. I, p. xix.

But we can blame Stalin, for instance, for his purges of the 1930's. The essential point is to distinguish between what is "accidental" and what is "necessary" in history. To the former belongs our value judgments on the individual's actions. It is the realm of "accident" or "chance," i.e., the realm of "freedom." It is not the realm where events are uncaused or undetermined. On the contrary, its events are caused but their causal relationships are beyond the possibility of fitting them into the "necessary" pattern of history.

In order to be able to estimate the role of "accident" in history according to Marx, and consequently to understand, at least, some aspects of the role of the great individual in history, we should examine the so-called "accidental view of history." According to this theory, events are caused but their causes are determined by chance coincidences. In other words, history becomes a series of accidental events, a conglomeration of accidents attributable only to the most casual causes. The hypothetical illustrations, given by those who hold such a view of history, are many. For example, if Cleopatra's nose had been somewhat shorter, then the course of history would have changed; if Mirabeau did not die of fever, then the French Revolution would have not taken place; if Robespierre had been killed by the accidental fall of a brick, then the course of the French Revolution would have been different; if Napoleon had been struck down by ^abullet then the history of France after the Revolution would have been radically changed; and if

Lenin's premature death at the age of fifty-four did not occur, then the subsequent history of Soviet Russia would have been altered. All these examples and many others could be offered as illustrations of the accidental theory of history. These examples imply that an accident like the sudden death of a prominent individual would result in a basic change in the course of events. Moreover, such a theory entails that not only accidents influence the course of history (which could be maintained by other schools of thought), but accidents are of the ^{very} core of history. In other words, history hinges upon them. Such a theory implies that "everything is possible in human history" and hence history has no meaning or pattern which would limit the infinite number of possibilities. Historical events would become absolutely unique. Not only we cannot control or repeat historical events, but any search for similarities and analogous developments would be completely futile. Any explanation in history would be merely enumerating the many causes which played a role in the "making" of the event, and every one of these causes would be as good as the others. Learning from past events would become impossible, because at any moment there is the possibility of having a new "accident" which would turn upside down all the calculations which we have made about the expected event based on past experience with "similar" events. Such a conception of history would make every historical event a completely new chapter, neither relevant to past events nor to future ones. Thus, with such a view

of history, the historian defeats his own purpose and history proper ceases to exist.

On the hand, there is a fatalistic conception of history. It is the complete denial of a realm of "accident" in history. Every single event in history is determined and fits into the pattern of history. This pattern penetrates into every detail of human life. Fatalism does not only assert that every event has a cause, but that all these causes form part and parcel of a plan or pattern which constitutes history. Such a theory implies that if we can know the historical pattern, then we can predict all historical events to the smallest detail. It is the complete denial of free will, making the latter identical with determinism. The individual's free will is simply an illusion because it is, itself, determined. Every action is predetermined, in the sense that it can not be otherwise. Such a view of history is both mystical and irrefutable. Fatalism reminds us of the all-pervasive medieval teleological mode of thought which regards every aspect of human life as being purposive in nature. It is just like the primitive animistic conception of the world which infuses life in every object in the universe, for it injects "meaning" into every historical event. Fatalism is irrefutable because it is tautological in nature; if everything fits into a pattern, then whether an event x is determined is no longer an empirical question because it is by definition that x is determined.

Marx's and Engels' conception of history is a half-way house between the "accidental" and the fatalistic conceptions of history. If the theory which says there is no meaning in history is the thesis, and the theory which views history as being "soaked" with meaning as the antithesis, then Marx's and Engels' conception is the synthesis of both. In other words, their conception of history allows room for both "accident" and "necessity" with an emphasis on the latter. The recognition of "accident" in history and the assessment of its role in history is expressed by Marx in a letter to Kugelmann: "world history would indeed be very easy to make, if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances. It would on the other hand be of a very mystical nature, if "accidents" played no part. These accidents themselves fall naturally into the general course of development and are compensated for, again, by other accidents. But acceleration and delay are very dependent upon such "accidents" which include the "accident" of the character of who at first stand at the head of the movement."¹ Thus, to Marx, "chance" is not very important in history; it could accelerate or delay, but not, therefore, radically change the course of history. Sometimes chances are compensated by other chances, so that in the end their effects would cancel each other. And moreover Marx gives the character of the great individual as an illustration

¹ Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence, pp. 310-311.

of "chance" in history.

Marx's theory of "accident" or "chance," limits the role of "accident" to acceleration or retardation of the historical developments. If Marx means that for example the death of Napoleon merely retards or accelerates the defeat of France in the Battle of Waterloo (assuming that a new French military leader takes the place of Napoleon), then Marx's view is mystical and untenable. The accidental death of a prominent individual might lead to the elimination of a series of historical events from the stage of historical realization i.e. they simply do not occur. If we take the example of Napoleon, again, then we can say that if he dies before his rise to power then this would alter the history of France in some respects, depending on the military general who takes the place of Napoleon i.e. on whether he has similar ambitions which would make him attempt to conquer Europe, and whether he has the military genius of Napoleon. But however Marx's theory of "accident" as expressed in the above-mentioned quotation, does not deal with "accident" in relation to specific historical events but in relation to general historical developments. The death of Napoleon would not alter the development of the bourgeois mode of production in France. Neither ^{did} the premature death of Lenin at the age of fifty-four altered the socio-economic development of the Soviet society. In this latter sense, Marx's theory about the acceleration or delay of historical developments as a result of "accidents,"

could make sense. To Marx, a significant historical event like the French Revolution which is the culmination of the transition from feudalism to Capitalism, can not be altered by pure accidents. For instance, if Mirabeau did not die, then the constitutional monarchist party would have retained its power for a longer time i.e. its resistance to the republicans would have been stronger. But however no Mirabeau could have averted the ultimate victory of the republicans. Thus, no matter what are the "accidents" and no matter how intricately may have been connected, "they would not under any circumstances have eliminated the great social needs that gave rise to the French Revolution; and as long as these needs remain unsatisfied the revolutionary movement in France would have continued."¹

Marx's statement that one chance is compensated by another chance, and, hence, leaving more or less, the general trend of development intact, has a limited validity. It especially applies to the emergence of a great individual in history, and if he is removed then a substitute would replace him,² and, hence, an accident is compensated by another accident.

To Marx and Engels, the rise of a great individual in a certain society and in a certain historical period, is not a pure accident; but on the contrary his rise is necessitated by the prevailing con-

¹ Plekhanov, The Role of the Individual in History, p. 44.

² Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence, p. 518.

ditions. For instance, according to Engels, the French Republic exhausted by its own war has rendered necessary the need for a military dictator. Thus, the need for a great individual is not accidental; however, that Napoleon, just that particular Corsican is to be the military dictator, is a pure accident. But if Napoleon is removed "there will be a demand for a substitute, and this substitute will be found, good or bad, but in the long run he will be found."¹ In other words, the specific conditions of a particular country make necessary the need for a great man, but whether he is a man of genius like Napoleon, Caesar or Cromwell, is a purely accidental thing, depending on his character and his own capabilities.

The great individual "freely" exercises his role, only, in the realm of "freedom" or "accident." In this realm he "makes" history in the literal sense of the word. ^{By} the mere fact that he fights, for instance, in a battle as the military leader or launches a war against another country, he is "making" history, Plekhanov cites the war of the Austrian succession and ^{the} Seven Years' war as examples of the accidental character of events which are almost purely moulded by the historical personalities who are involved in these events.² To explain these wars as directly caused by the socio-economic development of the concerned countries, is purely nonsensical. These wars and their consequences depended upon the role played by the rulers of the

¹ Ibid.

² Plekhanov, The Role of the Individual in History, pp. 34-35.

countries involved. For instance, Louis XV could very easily compel Austria to cede some of its territories as a result of the brilliant victories achieved by the French army in the war of Austrian Succession. But he did not claim any territory because as he said, he was fighting as a king and not as a merchant, and France gained nothing from the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle. Thus it all depended, more or less, on the individual's role as it is "freely" played by himself. In other words, in the above-mentioned example, it is clear that the socio-economic development of France as forming the general trend of historical development recedes to the background leaving room for the great individual to play his role quite "freely." Plekhanov's claim that the annexation of territories to France as a result of the war of Austrian Succession - if Louis XV had a different character - would lead to a change in the economic development of the country,¹ is an exaggeration, and it disregards an important point, namely, the possibility of losing these same territories by France in another war. Similarly, the results of the Seven Years' war which was unnecessary for France to wage, and whose causes were of an "accidental" nature, i.e., depending on the actions of historical personages such as Maria-Theresa, Madame Pompadour, Louis XV etc., were the loss of France's best colonies, "which undoubtedly greatly influenced," says Plekhanov, "the development of her economic rela-

¹ Ibid., p. 34.

tions."¹ But such a view of the relationship between "accident" and "necessity," i.e., the general trend of socio-economic development, is far-fetched and untenable. It tries to create an artificial connection between "accidents" and the general socio-economic development when there is no relationship at all or when there is only an indirect relationship (e.g. a relationship of mere co-existence) which can not be described as that of causation.

But if the great individual plays a role in history due to his personal peculiarities (e.g. Louis XV in the War of Austrian Succession), does this mean that the great individual can by the "sudden decision of his will" change the course of events to a considerable extent? As long as the individual plays his role in the realm of "accident," then historical events which belong to this realm are partly moulded by his action. But however when he tries to influence the realm of "necessity," then his mere individual will is not sufficient to realize his purposes. In other words, when the great individual faces the realm of "necessity," his role changes its nature. He can no longer change the historical events by the mere exercise of his will. To the realm of necessity belongs the great revolutionary upheavals which the great individual can not resist. The French Revolution belongs to the realm of necessity, in the sense, that the needs which gave rise to it have to be satisfied. The urgent need of France at the end of the eight-

¹ Ibid., pp. 35-36.

eenth century was the substitution for the obsolete political institutions of new institutions in conformity with its socio-economic development. The bourgeoisie in France wanted political supremacy after the imperceptible development of the productive forces and the corresponding relations of production gave the revolutionary bourgeoisie its supremacy in the socio-economic realm. In such a situation the great individual can not resist the "necessary" development. At most, he can prolong or shorten the birth pangs.¹ Thus the general trend of history, according to Marx and Engels, can not be changed or stopped by the great individual. The latter can merely stamp the historical developments with a touch of his individual qualities. The general historical development in a particular country is the product of history and the great individual is unable to change the course of development which is the cumulative product of the actions of millions of individuals of the preceding generations. But to talk about the general historical development, is an abstraction, if we do not refer to the historical situation in which the socio-economic development of a given country proceeds. Thus we have three levels of causation. First we have the general causes pertaining to the specific epoch of history e.g. the bourgeois epoch. Second, we have the particular causes which operate in a specific country and which differ from one country to another although they,

¹ Marx, Capital, Vol. I, p. xix.

socio-economically speaking, belong to the same historical epoch. Third, we have the individual causes which pertain to the personal qualities of great individuals and other "accidents." Individual causes can not bring about fundamental changes in the operation of general and particular causes which, moreover, determine the trend and limits of the influence of individual causes. Obviously the elimination of the individual causes in history would lead to a different conception of history which is, more or less, identical with fatalism.

The great individual, when faced with a "necessity" development, has two alternatives: either to go against the course of development or to support it. The great individual can not change the course of history, i.e., for example, a great individual can not re-introduce the feudal mode of production in Britain. Neither a great man in the Soviet Russia can go back to the semi-bourgeois mode of production prevailing in tsarist Russia. In the language of Marx, no great man can foist on society socio-economic relations which no longer conform to the level of the productive forces, or which do not yet conform to them. In this sense, the great individual can not make history. In this sense he can not leap over the successive normal developments in a particular society.¹

But to Marx and Engels, not all historical events, and, consequently, historical causes are of equal significance, i.e., there

¹ Ibid.

is hierarchy of causes which place the general and particular causes at the top of the scale. As E.H. Carr correctly points out that in "the realm of historical truth" fact and value are inseparable in history.¹ Thus, to Marx and Engels, the development of the forces of production and the corresponding social relations of production is the most significant historical fact. In other words, the development which takes place in the realm of "necessity" is far much more significant than the events and developments which take place in the realm of accident and which have no influence on the realm of "necessity." The dynastic wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which took place between the different European countries are of lesser importance than the French Revolution. The latter marks a decisive stage in the development of history, while the former do not affect directly the general trend of history.

Thus, we can talk too about heirarchy of great men. A great man, according to Marx, is great not because his personal qualities stamped historical events with his individual features, but because he possesses qualities which make him most capable of serving the great needs of his society, needs which are a result of general and particular causes. He is great because he sees further than others, and through his insight he is able to envisage the future development of his society. He points to the new social needs created by

¹ E.H. Carr, op.cit., pp. 175-176.

the preceding development of the social relations of production, and he takes the initiative in fulfilling the newly-emerging social needs. Because he knows the course of the socio-economic development, i.e. he knows in what direction socio-economic relations are changing, consequently, he is able to influence the course of their development. Thus, in this sense too, the great individual "makes" history the great man is always a representative of either an established existing social force (ruling class) or forces which he helps to change the existing social order (i.e. when he represents a revolutionary class). In the latter case, a higher degree of creativity is required. In the words of Hegel, we find the best description of a great individual: "the great man of the age is the one who can put into words the will of his age, tell his age what its will is, and accomplish it. What he does is the heart and the essence of his age; he actualizes his age."¹

Moreover, the great individual, according to Marx and Engels, is not a mere "sign" or "symbol" of the socio-economic development. On the contrary, the great man is necessary for the development of socio-economic conditions, and especially in revolutionary periods where the great individual plays an indispensable role to facilitate the practical "solution of the problem," i.e., the transition from one epoch to another. But the solving of the problem does not mean that the great individual is only a symbol or a sign, but an indis-

¹ From Hegel's Philosophy of Right, cited by E.H. Carr in his What is History?, p. 68.

pensable link in the historic chain. If the materialist conception of history is fatalistic, then the problem of the timing of the revolution would not arise, and, consequently, the role of the great individual would be reduced almost to nothing. But however, the role of the great individual in a revolutionary period is of paramount importance, because strong leadership and full understanding of the revolutionary situation, are preconditions of a successful revolutionary upheaval.

In conclusion we can say that the materialist conception of history is neither fatalistic nor "accidental," but a synthesis of both. Thus history, to Marx and Engels, has two realms: the realm of "necessity" and the realm of "accidents." These two realms are not absolutely distinct and separate, on the contrary, they influence each other and in actual history, they are inseparably coexistent. Otherwise, Marx and Engels hold that, in principle, one can draw a line of demarcation between them, more or less, defining their boundaries. It is in the realm of "accident" where the great individual plays his role quite "freely," i.e., the "making" of historical events as the direct result of his peculiar qualities and capabilities. But however, the great individual of the realm of "accidents" is capable, only, of indirectly influencing, the general trend of historical events and developments which belong to the realm of "necessity." It is in this latter realm that the role of the great individual - although the role itself is reduced in contrast to his role in the realm of "accidents" - becomes of paramount importance. This latter

role shows that the great individual is at once a product and an agent of the historical process. He is both the representative and the "maker" of social forces which change the world.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that the role of the individual in history according to Marx and Engels can not be discussed and analyzed except if we divide individuals into three categories: the average individual, the individual thinker, and the great individual. Thus there is no abstract individual who plays a role in history. Furthermore, in each category the role played by the individual differs from one individual to another depending upon whether the individual belongs to or represents a significant class or social force in the specific society in which he is living. For example, in transitional periods, the role of the average individual increases and becomes more significant if he belongs to the revolutionary class. Similarly, the individual thinker and the great individual play a greater and a more significant role if they belong to or represent the revolutionary class. While in non-transitional periods, i.e., in pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods, the role of the individual increases and becomes more significant if he belongs to or represents the existing social forces, i.e., the established ruling class.

The individual (whether he is the average individual, the thinker or the great individual) is faced with historical conditions which he did not choose, but this does warrant viewing him in contrast to historical "necessity" because he is not helpless vis-a-vis

this "necessity." The individual can transform the historical conditions which he inherited from past generations. In other words, the average individual in his activity for the production of the means of livelihood, the individual thinker in the production of effective ideas, and the great individual play, consciously or unconsciously, a role in history. Moreover, no one of these individuals, not even the great individual, should be contrasted to history, i.e., as abstract individuals standing outside history, for they, themselves, are products of history. Their actions are not actions of isolated individuals acting in a vacuum: they are acted in specific conditions and under the impulse of a past society. To Marx, the individual is inseparable from society, and any antithesis between the individual and society becomes untenable.

According to Marx and Engels, no one of the three categories of individuals, if taken separately, can play their role in history without the others. In other words, the average individual's role, the individual thinker's role and the great individual's role supplement each other. History is made as an outcome of their respective roles. Every historical change or development can not be conceived except as the product of the roles of the three different categories of men.

But one should conceive history as made by the actions of a great number of individuals acting and interacting on each other. However, when millions of individuals are regarded as the actors on

the stage of history, then this does not mean they cease to be individuals or become impersonal forces. On the contrary, history according to Marx and Engels, is always made by men, and the conception of history as impersonal extraneous forces, as a history with capital H, is untenable. "History does nothing, it possesses no immense wealth fights no battles. It is rather man, real living man who does everything, who possesses and fights."¹

The role of the average individuals, when viewed in its totality, constitutes the specific expression and realization of the historical laws operating in a given society. These historical laws which are the products of men's actions in the past, serve as the basis for both the individual thinker and the great individual, to express and actualize, respectively, the needs of their society. But to be able to realize these historical needs, they have to represent a social force, a class, i.e., a mass of followers, which would act as the lever of change. On the other hand, every mass movement needs its theoreticians and its great men, to express in words the needs of the masses and to guide them to realize their aims. Therefore, the roles of the average individual, the individual thinker and the great individual are dialectically interconnected.

¹ Marx and Engels, The Holy Family, p. 125.

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