



The Causes of Alienation

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It was by studying Hegel that Marx first came across the concept of alienation. But, oddly enough, it was not the theory of alienated labour that he originally picked up from Hegel's works. It was the alienation of man as a citizen in his relationship with the state that became the starting point of Marx's philosophical, political and social thought.

The social contract theory maintained that in organised society the individual must forfeit a certain number of individual rights to the state as the representative of the collective interest of the community. Hegel especially had developed this idea which was so strongly enunciated by the theoreticians of the natural rights philosophy. That also served as the starting point of Marx's critique of Hegel and his beginning as a critical social thinker in general.

Some small incidents which happened in the Rhine province of western Germany around 1842-43 (the increase in the number of people who stole wood and the intervention of the government against these people) led Marx to conclude that the state, which purports to represent the collective interest, instead represented the interests of only one part of the society, that is to say, those who own private property. Therefore the forfeiture of individual rights to that state represented a phenomenon of alienation: the loss of rights by people to institutions which were in reality hostile to them.

Starting from that political-philosophical platform, Marx, who in the meantime had been expelled from Germany and had gone into exile in France, got in contact with the first socialist and workers organisations there and began to study economics, especially the classical writers of British political economy, the Adam Smith-Ricardo school. This was the background for Marx's first attempt in 1844 at a synthesis of philosophical and economic ideas in the so-called **Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844**, also called the **Parisian Manuscripts**. This was an attempt to integrate his ideas about labour in bourgeois society with ideas about the fate of man, man's position in history, and his existence on earth.

This initial youthful attempt at synthesis was carried out with very inadequate means. At that period Marx did not yet have a thorough knowledge of political economy; he had only started to acquaint himself with some of the basic notions of the classical school in political economy; and he had little direct or indirect experience with the modern industrial system. He would obtain all that only during the next ten years.

This unfinished early work was unknown for a very long time. It was first published in 1932, nearly one hundred

years after it was written. Accordingly, much of the discussion which had been going on in economic as well as philosophic circles, about what he thought in his youth and how he arrived at a certain number of his basic concepts, was very much distorted by an ignorance of this specific landmark in his intellectual development.

Immature as parts of it might seem and are, especially the economic part, it nevertheless represents a major turning point both in Marx's intellectual development and in the intellectual history of mankind. Its importance, which I will try to explain, is linked with the concept of alienation.

Alienation is a very old idea which has religious origins and is almost as old as organised religion itself. It was taken over by nearly all the classical philosophical trends in the West as in the East. This concept turns around what one could call the tragic fate man. Hegel, who was one of the greatest German philosophers, took over the idea from his predecessors but gave it a new slant and a new basis which denoted momentous progress. He did this by changing the foundation of that concept of the tragic fate of man from a vague anthropological and philosophical concept into a concept rooted in labour.

Hegel, before Marx, said that man is alienated because human labour is alienated. He gave two explanations for this general alienation of human labour. One is what he called the dialectics of need and labour. Human needs, he said, are always one step ahead of the available economic resources; people will therefore always be condemned to work very hard to fulfil unsatisfied needs. However, the attempt to equalise the organisation of material resources with the necessity of satisfying all human needs is an impossible task, a goal which can never be attained. That was one aspect of what Hegel called alienated labour.

The other side of his philosophical analysis was a bit more complicated. It is summarised in a difficult word, the word “externalisation” (*Entäußerung*). Though the term is complicated and sounds foreign, its content is easier to understand. Hegel meant by the philosophical concept of externalisation the fact that every man who works, who produces something, really reproduces in his work an idea which he initially had in his head. Some of you might be astonished if I immediately add that Marx shared that opinion. You will find this same idea, that any work which man performs lives in his head before being realised in material reality, in the first chapter of **Capital**. Hegel, as well as Marx, thereby drew a basic distinction between people and, let us say, ants or other creatures which seem to be busily at work but do things purely on instinct. Man, on the other hand, first develops an idea about what he aims to do, and then tries to realise that idea.

Hegel goes a step farther when he asks, what do we do in reality when we try to express in material, what first lives in us as an idea? We inevitably separate ourselves from the product of our labour. Anything which we project out of ourselves, anything which we fabricate, anything which we produce, we project out of our own body and it becomes separate from us. It cannot remain as much part and parcel of our being as an idea which continues to live in our head. That was for Hegel the main, let us say, anthropological, definition of alienated labour. He therefore arrived at the conclusion that every and any kind of labour is alienated labour because in any society and under any conditions men will always be condemned to become separated from the products of their labour.

When Marx takes up these two definitions of alienated labour given by Hegel, he contradicts both of them. He says that the discrepancy between needs and material resources,

the tension between needs and labour, is a limited one, conditioned by history. It is not true that man's needs can develop in an unlimited way or that the output of his collective labour will always remain inferior to these needs. He denies this most emphatically on the basis of a historical analysis. He especially rejects Hegel's idealistic identification of externalisation with alienation. Marx says that when we separate ourselves from the product of our labour it does not necessarily follow that the product of our labour then oppresses us or that any material forces whatsoever turn against men. Such alienation is not the result of the projection of things out of our body as such, which first live in us as ideas and then take on a material existence as objects, as products of our labour.

Alienation results from a certain form of organisation of society. More concretely, only in a society which is based on commodity production and only under the specific economic and social circumstances of a market economy, can the objects which we project out of us when we produce acquire a socially oppressive existence of their own and be integrated in an economic and social mechanism which becomes oppressive and exploitative of human beings.

The tremendous advance in human thought which I referred to in this critique of Hegel consists in the fact that Marx rejects the idea of the alienation of labour as being an anthropological characteristic, that is, an inherent and ineradicable curse of mankind. He says that the alienation of labour is not bound to human existence in all places and for all future time. It is a specific result of specific forms of social and economic organisation. In other words, Marx transforms Hegel's notion of alienated labour from an eternal anthropological notion into a transitory historical notion.

This reinterpretation carries a message of hope for humanity. Marx says that humanity is not condemned to live “by the sweat of its brow” under alienated conditions throughout its whole term on earth. It can become free, its labour can become free, it is capable of self-emancipation, though only under specific historical conditions. Later I will define what specific social and economic conditions are required for the disappearance of alienated labour.

Let us now pass from the first systematic exposition of his theory of alienation in the **Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844** to his main work, **Capital**, which was published over twenty years later. It is true that the word alienation hardly appears there.

A new profession has sprung up in the last thirty years which is called “Marxology”. Its practitioners read through the works of Marx and put on small index cards all the words he uses in his books and then try to draw some conclusions about his thought from their philological statistics. Some people have even used computers in this type of formal analysis. These “Marx-philologists” have so far discovered six places in **Capital** where the word “alienation” is used either as a noun or as a verb. I certainly will not dispute that colossal discovery though somebody may find a seventh spot or there could be some dispute about the sixth one.

On the basis of such an analysis of **Capital**, done in a purely verbal and superficial way, it could be concluded that the mature Marx did not have a real theory of alienation. Marx would then have discarded it after his youth, after his immature development, especially when, around 1856-57, he became thoroughly convinced of the correctness of the labour theory of value and perfected that labour theory of value himself.

When the **Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844** were published for the first time in 1932, a big controversy arose around these issues. At least three trends can be distinguished in the debate. I will not cite the names of all the authors who have participated in it since more than a hundred people have written on the subject and the controversy is far from having ended. Some said there is a contradiction between the youthful and the mature works and Marx abandoned his original theories when his own views were fully developed.

Others said the opposite. The real Marx is to be found in the youthful works and he later degenerated by restricting the scope of his understanding to purely economic problems. He thus fell victim to the deviation of economism.

Still other people tried to deny that Marx's ideas underwent any significant or substantial evolution whatsoever. Among these are the American Erich Fromm, the French Marxist scholar Maximilien Rubel, and two French Catholic priests, Fathers Bigo and Calvez. They maintain that the same ideas are contained in his early as in his later works.

I think all three of these opinions are wrong. There was an important evolution, not an identical repetition, in Marx's thought from decade to decade. Any person who thinks, and continues to think and live, will not say exactly the same thing when he is 60 as when he was 25. Even if it is conceded that the basic concepts remain the same, there is obviously some progress, some change. In this concrete case the evolution is all the more striking, as I said before, because the Marx of 1844 had not yet accepted the labour theory of value which is a cornerstone of the economic theory he developed ten or fifteen years later.

One of the pivotal questions in this continuing debate is whether the mature Marx held a theory of alienation or whether he altogether abandoned his original theory of alienation. This dispute, which can be resolved on a documentary basis, would not have gone on so long and inconclusively if it had not been for another unfortunate accident.

It happened that another major work of Marx, **Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie (Fundamental Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy)**, a thirteen-hundred-page work written in 1857-58, which is a kind of laboratory where all the major ideas of **Capital** were first elaborated and tested, was also not published until a century after it was written. Its first publication occurred at the beginning of the Second World War in Russia, but most of the copies were destroyed as a result of the war. I believe only two copies arrived in the United States and none were available in Western Europe. The Russians under Stalin were not eager to reproduce it a second time. Thus it was not until the 1950s, almost a century after it had been originally written, that the book was reprinted and became known to a certain number of experts in a few countries.

Unfortunately, only in the last year have portions of this major work of Marx been translated into English. It appeared in French only a short time ago. So some of the participants in this dispute did have the excuse that they did not know that key work. For anybody who reads it can at once see that a Marxist theory of alienation exists because in the **Grundrisse** the word, the concept, and the analysis appear dozens and dozens of times.

What then is this theory of alienation as it was developed by the mature Marx, not by the young Marx? And how can we relate it to what is set down in **Capital**? There is first a

purely formal difficulty here because Marx uses three different terms in this connection and he uses them in an interchangeable manner. One is the concept of alienation; another is the concept of reification, a complicated word; and a third is the concept of commodity fetishism, which is still more complicated. However, these three concepts are not so difficult to explain, and I will try to clarify their meaning for you.

Let us start this analysis with a definition of economic alienation. I must immediately state that in the comprehensive Marxist theory of alienation, economic alienation is only one part of a much more general phenomenon which covers practically all fields of human activity in class society. But it is the most decisive element. So let's start from economic alienation. We will approach it in successive stages. The first and most striking feature of economic alienation is the separation of people from free access to the means of production and means of subsistence. This is a rather recent development in human history. As late as the nineteenth century free access to the means of production in agriculture survived in some countries of the world, among others, in the United States and Canada. Until after the American Civil War it was not impossible for masses of people to find some unpreempted spot of land and to establish themselves on that acreage as free farmers, as homesteaders. In Europe that possibility had ceased to exist for two hundred years, and in some countries there even three or four hundred years earlier.

That historical factor is the starting point for any theory of alienation because the institution of wage labour in which people are forced to sell their labour power to another person, to their employer, can come into existence on a large scale only when and where free access to the means of production and subsistence is denied to an important part of

society. Thus the first precondition for the alienation of labour occurs when labour becomes separated from the basic means of production and subsistence.

I said this is a relatively new phenomenon. A second example may illuminate this more sharply. The classical historical criticism made by liberal thought in the nineteenth century about the society of the middle ages, feudal society, was the lack of freedom of the cultivators of the soil. I won't take exception to that criticism which I think was correct. The direct producers in that society, the peasants and serfs, were not free people. They could not move about freely; they were tied to the land.

But what the bourgeois liberal critics of feudal society forgot was that tying people to the land was a two-sided phenomenon. If a person was tied to the land, the land was also tied to the person. And because the land was tied to the person there wasn't any important part of the people living within feudal relations who could be forced to become wage labourers and sell their labour power to owners of capital. They had access to the land, they could produce their own means of subsistence and keep part of it for themselves. Only people outside organised feudal society, in reality outlaws, because that is what they were originally, could become the starting point for new social classes – wage labourers on the one hand, merchants on the other.

The second stage in the alienation of labour came about when part of society was driven off the land, no longer had access to the means of production and means of subsistence, and, in order to survive, was forced to sell its labour power on the market. That is the main characteristic of alienated labour. In the economic field it is the institution of wage labour, the economic obligation of people who cannot otherwise survive to sell the only commodity they possess, their labour power, on the labour market.

What does it mean to sell your labour power to a boss? In Marx's analysis, both in his youthful and his mature work, behind this purely formal and legal contractual relation – you sell your labour power, part of your time, to another for money to live on – is in reality something of deep-going consequence for all human existence and particularly for the life of the wage labourer. It first of all implies that you lose control over a large part of your waking hours. All the time which you have sold to the employer belongs to him, not to you. You are not free to do what you want at work. It is the employer who dictates what you will and will not do during this whole time. He will dictate what you produce, how you produce it, where you produce it. He will be master over your activity.

And the more the productivity of labour increases and the shorter the workweek becomes, the stricter will be the control of the employer over every hour of your time as a wage labourer. In time and motion studies – the ultimate and most perfected form of this control – the boss even tries to control every second, literally every second, of the time which you spend in his employ.

Alienation thereupon acquires a third form. When a wage earner has sold his labour power for a certain part of his life to his employer, the products of his labour are not his own. The products of his labour become the property of the employer.

The fact that the modern wage earner owns none of the products of his own labour, obvious as it may appear to people who are accustomed to bourgeois society, is not at all so self-evident from the viewpoint of human history as a whole. It was not like that for thousands upon thousands of years of human existence. Both the medieval handicraftsman and the handicraftsman of antiquity were the proprietors of their own products. The peasant, and even

the serf of the middle ages, remained in possession of at least 50 per cent, sometimes 60 and 70 per cent, of the output of their own labour.

Under capitalism not only does the wage earner lose possession of the product of his labour, but these products can function in a hostile and injurious manner against him. This happened with the machine. This remarkable product of human ingenuity becomes a source of tyranny against the worker when the worker serves as an appendage of the machine and is forced to adapt the cadence of his life and work to the operation of the machine. This can become a serious source of alienation in shift work when part of the working class has to work during the night or at odd hours in conflict with the normal rhythm of human life between day and night. Such an abnormal schedule causes all sorts of psychological and nervous disorders.

Another aspect of the oppressive nature which the products of labour can acquire once society is divided into hostile classes of capitalists and wage workers are the crises of overproduction, depressions or, as it is nowadays more prudently put, recessions. Then people consume less because they produce too much. And they consume less, not because their labour is inadequately productive, but because their labour is too productive.

We come now to a final form of alienated labour in the economic field which derives from the conclusions of the points I have noted. The alienation of the worker and his labour means that something basic has changed in the life of the worker. What is it? Normally everybody has some creative capacity, certain talents lodged in him, untapped potentialities for human development which should be expressed in his labour activity.

However, once the institution of wage labour is prevalent, these possibilities become nullified. Work is no longer a means of self-expression for anybody who sells his labour time. Work is just a means to attain a goal. And that goal is to get money, some income to be able to buy the consumer goods necessary to satisfy your needs.

In this way a basic aspect of human nature, the capacity to perform creative work, becomes thwarted and distorted. Work becomes something which is not creative and productive for human beings but something which is harmful and destructive. Catholic priests and Protestant pastors who have worked in factories in Western Europe, the so-called “worker-priests”, who have written books about their experiences, have arrived at conclusions on this point that are absolutely identical with those of Marxism. They declare that a wage earner considers the hours passed in factories or in offices as time lost from his life. He must spend time there in order to get freedom and capacity for human development outside the sphere of production and of work.

Ironically, this hope for fulfilment during leisure time turns out to be an illusion. Many humanitarian and philanthropic reformers of liberal or social-democratic persuasion in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries thought that men could become liberated when their leisure time would increase. They did not understand that the nature of leisure was likewise determined by the nature of wage labour and by the conditions of a society based on commodity production and wage labour.

Once socially necessary labour time became shorter and leisure time greater, a commercialisation of leisure took place. The capitalist society of commodity production, the so-called “consumer society” did its utmost to integrate

leisure time into the totality of economic phenomena at the basis of commodity production, exploitation and accumulation.

At this point the notion of alienation is extended from a purely economic to a broader social phenomenon. The first bridge to this wider application is the concept of alienation of the consumer. Thus far we have spoken only about the consequences of alienated labour. But one of the cardinal characteristics of capitalist society, as Marx understood as early as 1844, is its built-in contradiction regarding human needs. On the one hand, each capitalist entrepreneur tries to limit the human needs of his own wage earners as much as possible by paying as little wages as possible. Otherwise he would not make enough profit to accumulate.

On the other hand, each capitalist sees in the work force of all the other capitalists not wage earners but potential consumers. He would therefore like to expand the capacity of consumption of these other wage earners to the limit or otherwise he cannot increase production and sell what his own workers produce. Thus capitalism has a tendency to constantly extend the needs of people.

Up to a certain point this expansion can cover genuine human needs, such as the elementary requirements of feeding, housing and clothing everybody in more or less decent circumstances. Very quickly, however, capitalism in its efforts to commercialise everything and sell as many gadgets as possible, goes beyond any rational human needs and starts to spur and stimulate artificial needs in a systematic, large-scale manner. Some of these are absurd and grotesque. Let me give one example. An American author, Jessica Mitford, has written an amusing book, called **The American Way of Death**. It describes the practices of morticians who seek to induce people to buy more expensive coffins so that the beloved dead can rest not only

peacefully, but lightly, on foam mattresses. The sales pitchmen say this satisfies, not the corpse, but the feelings of the consumer.

Is it necessary to observe that no real need is involved in this grotesque attempt of the burial business to make money? It is scandalous to feed in this mercenary manner upon the feelings of grief of people who have lost members of their family.

Such alienation is no longer purely economic but has become social and psychological in nature. For what is the motivation of a system for constantly extending needs beyond the limits of what is rational? It is to create, purposely and deliberately, permanent and meretricious dissatisfactions in human beings. Capitalism would cease to exist if people were fully and healthily satisfied. The system must provoke continued artificial dissatisfaction in human beings because without that dissatisfaction the sales of new gadgets which are more and more divorced from genuine human needs cannot be increased.

A society which is turned toward creating systematic frustration of this kind generates the bad results recorded in the crime pages of the daily newspapers. A society which breeds worthless dissatisfaction will also breed all kinds of antisocial attempts to overcome this dissatisfaction.

Beyond this alienation of human beings as consumers, there are two very important aspects of alienation. One is the alienation of human activity in general. The other is the alienation of human beings in one of their most fundamental features, the capacity to communicate.

What is meant by the extension of the concept of alienation to human activity in general? We live in a society based on commodity production and a social division of labour pushed to the limits of overspecialisation. As a result,

people in a particular job or doing a certain type of activity for a living will incline to have an extremely narrow horizon. They will be prisoners of their trade, seeing only the problems and preoccupations of their specialty. They will also tend to have a restricted social and political awareness because of this limitation.

Along with this shut-in horizon will go something which is much worse, the tendency to transform relations between human beings into relations between things. This is that famous tendency toward “reification”, the transformation of social relations into things, into objects, of which Marx speaks in **Capital**.

This way of looking at phenomena is an extension of this theory of alienation. Here is an example of this transformation which I witnessed the other day in this country. The waiters and waitresses in restaurants are poor working people who are the victims and not the authors of this process of reification. They are even unaware of the nature of their involvement in this phenomenon. While they are under heavy pressure to serve the maximum number of customers on the job imposed upon them by the system and its owners, they look upon the customers solely under the form of the orders they put in. I heard one waitress address herself to a person and say, “Ah, you are the corned-beef and cabbage”. You are not Mr. or Mrs. Brown, not a person of a certain age and with a certain address. You are “corned-beef and cabbage” because the waitress has on her mind the orders taken under stress from so many people.

This habit of reification is not the fault of the inhumanity or insensitivity of the workers. It results from a certain type of human relation rooted in commodity production and its extreme division of labour where people engaged in one trade tend to see their fellows only as customers or through

the lenses of whatever economic relations they have with them.

This outlook finds expression in everyday language. I have been told that in the city of Osaka, the main commercial and industrial capital of Japan, the common mode of addressing people when you meet is not “How do you do?” but “How is business?” or “Are you making money?” This signifies that bourgeois economic relations have so completely pervaded ordinary human relations as to dehumanise them to an appreciable extent.

I now come to the ultimate and most tragic form of alienation, which is alienation of the capacity to communicate. The capacity to communicate has become the most fundamental attribute of man, of his quality as a human being. Without communication, there can be no organised society because without communication, there is no language, and without language, there is no intelligence. Capitalist society, class society, commodity-producing society tends to thwart, divert and partially destroy this basic human capacity.

Let me give three examples of this process at three different levels, starting with a most commonplace case. How do people learn to communicate? While they are infants they go through what psychologists call a process of socialisation and learn to speak. For a long time one of the main methods of socialising young children has been through playing with dolls. When children play with dolls, they duplicate themselves, project themselves outside their own individuality, and carry on a dialogue with that other self. They speak two languages, their own language and the language of the doll, thereby bringing into play an artificial process of communication which, through its spontaneous nature, facilitates the development of language and intelligence.

Recently, industry started to produce dolls which speak. This is supposed to be a mark of progress. But once the doll speaks, the dialogue is limited. The child no longer speaks in two languages, or with the same spontaneity. Part of its speech is induced, and induced by some capitalist corporation.

That corporation may have hired the biggest educators and psychologists who make the doll speak more perfectly than any of the babble which could come out of the child's mind itself – although I have some doubts on that subject. Nevertheless, the spontaneous nature of the dialogue is partially thwarted, suppressed or detoured. There is less development of dialogue, of capacity for communication, and therefore a lesser formation of intelligence than in more backward times when dolls did not speak and children had to give them a language of their own.

A second example is taken from a more sophisticated level. Any class society which is divided by social-material interests and in which class struggle goes on suppresses to a certain extent the capacity for communication between people standing on different sides of the barricades. This is not a matter of lack of intelligence, of understanding or honesty, from any individual point of view. This is simply the effect of the inhibitive pressures that substantial divisive material interests exercise on any group of individuals.

Anybody who has ever been present at wage bargaining where there is severe tension between workers' and employers' representatives – I'm talking about real wage bargaining, not sham wage bargaining – will understand what I am referring to. The employers' side simply cannot sympathise with or understand what the workers are talking about even if they have the utmost good will and liberal opinions, because their material-social interests prevent

them from understanding what the other side is most concerned with.

There was a very striking example of this inhibition on another level (because workers and not employers were involved) in the tragic strike of the United Federation of Teachers in New York in 1968 against the decentralisation of control over the school system. People of bad will, fools or stupid people were not so much involved. Indeed, most of them would have been called liberal or even left some time ago. But through very strong pressures of social interest and social milieu, they were simply incapable of understanding what the other side, the Black and Puerto Rican masses who wanted community control over the education of their children, was talking about.

Thus the Marxist notion of alienation extends far beyond the oppressed classes of society, properly speaking. The oppressors are also alienated from part of their human capacity through their inability to communicate on a human basis with the majority of society. And this divorcement is inevitable as long as class society and its deep differentiations exist.

Another terrible expression of this alienation on the individual scale is the tremendous loneliness which a society based on commodity production and division of labour inevitably induces in many human beings. Ours is a society based on the principle, every man for himself. Individualism pushed to the extreme also means loneliness pushed to the extreme.

It is simply not true, as certain existentialist philosophers contend, that man has always been an essentially lonely human being. There have been forms of integrated collective life in primitive society where the very notion of loneliness could not arise. It arises out of commodity production and

division of labour only at a certain stage of human development in bourgeois society. And then unfortunately it acquires a tremendous extension which can go beyond the limits of mental health.

Psychologists have gone around with tape recorders and listened to certain types of dialogues between people in shops or on the street. When they play these dialogues afterwards they discover that there has been no exchange whatsoever. The two people have talked along parallel lines without once meeting with each other. Each talks because he welcomes the occasion to unburden himself, to get out of his loneliness, but he is incapable of listening to what the other person is saying.

The only meeting place is at the end of the dialogue when they say goodbye. Even that farewell is saddening because they want to save the possibility of unburdening themselves of their loneliness the next time they meet. They carry on what the French call dialogue de sounds, dialogues between deaf people, that is, dialogues between people who are incapable of understanding or listening to other people.

This is of course an extreme and marginal illustration. Happily, the majority of members of our society are not yet in that situation or otherwise we would be on the brink of a complete breakdown of social relations. Nonetheless, capitalism tends to extend the zone of this extreme loneliness with all its terrible implications.

This looks like a very dim picture, and the dim picture undoubtedly corresponds to the dim reality of our times. If the curve of mental sickness has climbed parallel with the curve of material wealth and income in most of the advanced countries of the West, this dismal picture has not been invented by Marxist critics but corresponds to very

deep-rooted aspects of the social and economic reality in which we live.

But, as I said before, this grim situation is not at all without hope. Our optimism comes from the fact that, after all this analysis of the roots of the alienation of labour and the specific expressions of the alienation of man in bourgeois society is completed, there emerges the inescapable conclusion that a society can be envisaged in which there will be no more alienation of labour and alienation of human beings. This is a historically produced and man-made evil, not an evil rooted in nature or human nature. Like everything else which has been made by man, it can also be unmade by man. This condition is a product of history and it can be destroyed by history or at least gradually overcome by further progress.

Thus the Marxist theory of alienation implies and contains a theory of disalienation through the creation of conditions for the gradual disappearance and eventual abolition of alienation. I stress “gradual disappearance” because such a process or institution can no more be abolished by fiat or a stroke of the pen than commodity production, the state, or the division of society into classes can be eliminated by a government decree or proclamation.

Marxists understand that the social and economic preconditions for a gradual disappearance of alienation can be brought about only in a classless society ushered in by a world socialist revolution. And when I say a classless socialist society, I obviously do not mean the societies which exist in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe or China. In the best cases these are transitional societies somewhere halfway between capitalism and socialism. Though private property has been abolished, they have not yet abolished the division of society into classes, they still have different social classes and different social layers, division of labour and

commodity production. As a consequence of these conditions, they still have alienated labour and alienated men.

The prerequisites for the disappearance of human alienation, of alienated labour and the alienated activities of human beings, can only be created precisely through the continuation of those processes I have just named: the withering away of commodity production, the disappearance of economic scarcity, the withering away of social division of labour through the disappearance of private ownership of the means of production and the elimination of the difference between manual and intellectual labour, between producers and administrators. All of this would bring about the slow transformation of the very nature of labour from a coercive necessity in order to get money, income and means of consumption into a voluntary occupation that people want to do because it covers their own internal needs and expresses their talents. This transformation of labour into all-sided creative human activity is the ultimate goal of socialism. Only when that is attained will alienated labour and all its pernicious consequences cease to exist.
