

# Dialectical Materialism: Outline for Study

**T**he questions below were used at a Progressive Labor Party national cadre school of 100 party members in July 1979, to help in learning dialectical materialism. Together with similar questions, they are being used throughout the Party and its base today to continue this study.

The article on Dialectical Materialism in the October-November 1977 PL Magazine (Vol. 10, No. 6) and the article in this issue, *Can History Be A Science?* are part of the effort to make dialectical materialism the property of the masses.

When the working class bases its actions on a dialectical materialist world outlook, it can make revolution, build socialism, and prevent that process from being reversed and capitalism restored. Without mass understanding of dialectical materialism, errors philosophically based on an idealist, metaphysical world outlook will eventually grow strong enough to reverse the process of building socialism. Dialectical materialism in the hands of only the party leaders, or even the members, is not suff-

icient. "Theory, when it grips the masses, is a material force." If the masses are not gripped by dialectical materialism, they are in the grip of bourgeois philosophy. There is no middle ground.

We cannot wait until after the revolution to suddenly bring our philosophy to the working class. That would mean building, from now until then, an anti-scientific, pragmatic world view. We have therefore already begun the effort to bring dialectical materialism right into the shops, the military bases, the neighborhoods, the campuses—alongside of and interpenetrating with our class struggles against the bosses.

We use questions because dialectical materialism cannot be grasped merely by memorizing answers. To learn dialectical materialism is to learn how to think—to grasp objective reality, and to influence it qualitatively better than before. It requires struggle, both internally and externally. It requires reading the PL articles and the Marxist classics on philosophy. It requires participation in the class struggle and application of dialectical materialism to the destruction of the enemy.

## Topic 1. Investigation, objectivity, subjectivity, universality.

- What is philosophy?
- What is science? Can history be a science?
- How do you buy a car, look for an apartment, get a job?
- How do you solve a political problem in your club?

## Topic 2. Materialism v. idealism.

- What is idealism? What is materialism?
- If the laws and categories of dialectical materialism are universal, i.e., are demonstrated by physics, chemistry, biology, cooking, children's development and all other processes, why wasn't the philosophy of Dialectical Materialism developed earlier in human history? Why did it arise in conjunction with the working-class movement?
- Does "being determine consciousness"?
- If it does, why aren't all the workers revolutionaries? Why do we say, "without revolutionary theory, there is no revolutionary movement"?
- Why do we need the Progressive Labor Party? Why do we need democratic centralism? (remember the question, what is science?)
- Why do we need PL Magazine?
- Why do we need to sell and write for **Challenge-Desafio**?
- Why do we need to recruit more people to PLP?
- Why do we need to build CAR on your job/

campus/school/neighborhood? Why does building CAR mean forming functioning chapters in addition to signing up members? (remember—this is related to the difference between materialism and idealism)

Why do we need to build an *international* communist movement?

## Topic 3. Internal contradiction is the primary mover of things.

- What is a contradiction?
  - What is a *main* contradiction?
  - What is the main contradiction in the universe, our solar system, the filament of an electric light bulb, a wood fire in a fire place?
  - What is the main contradiction in the (political) world? What is politics?
  - What is the main contradiction in the U.S.A.?
  - What is the main contradiction in the U.S. ruling class? in the U.S. working class?
  - What is the main contradiction in the Progressive Labor Party?
  - What is the main contradiction in you?
  - What is the main contradiction in the person you hope to recruit next? (How do you know?)
- ## Topic 4. Quantitative change leads to qualitative change leads to quantitative change . . .
- Describe a process from the kitchen involving quantitative and qualitative change.
  - Describe another physical, chemical and/or biological process involving quantity-quality.
  - How does a baby learn to walk? run? talk?

Why did you join PLP? Describe the process?  
Was joining PLP a qualitative change for you?  
For the party?

How have you changed since you joined PLP?  
How has the Party changed during this period?

What changes are taking place in your base?  
What are you doing about it?

Are you selling more C-D's? Is there a network? Are we getting ready for changes in the country?

Will fascism be a qualitative change? In what ways?

### Topic 5. The Negation of the Negation

What, literally, is a negation of a negation?  
What is the direction of history? Will we return to feudalism, or chattel slavery? Does history "repeat itself"?

Will PLP be able to lead a socialist revolution?  
How fast is history moving? Is change getting faster or slower?

Is it possible to understand much without studying history?

What is human nature? Has it changed? Were the American Indians greedy?

Can being in the Party change people?  
When people say, "You can't fight city hall," or "You can't change human nature," are they basing these statements on a study of history? What are these statements based on? Is there any material basis to these statements? What philosophy are they based on?

Do ideas like these ever come up in your head? Based on what?

### Topic 6. Likeness and difference.

What are the similarities between the Russian Revolution, the Paris Commune, the Chinese Revolution? What are the differences? Are they *more the same or more different?*

What are the similarities between you and your boss? What are the differences?

Are you more the same as your boss, or more different?

What are the similarities between you and a friend/fellow-worker who is not in PLP? What are the differences? Are you more the same or more different? Can this change?

What are the likenesses and differences among two or three people in your base? What different approaches to them do you use, taking these differences into account?

If you are a leader of a party club, section, or whatever, what are the likenesses and differences among the people you are giving leadership to? What different methods do you employ to take account of these differences?

When confronted with new people, situations, do you always ask yourself, is this *more the same or different to/from* something you already know about? Do you think this could be a useful tool?

### Topic 7. The apparent and the essential.

How do you judge people (what method of judging people does bourgeois society push?)?

### Topic 8. Limits.

Can you live to be 300 years old?  
If you live on a farm, and you lift up a calf every day, will you still be able to lift him when he is a full grown steer?

What if you started with a baby elephant? (Special for those who have been reading *Capital*). Prices appear to vary somewhat with supply and demand, and not correspond one-to-one with the number of labor hours embodied in the commodity. Under capitalism, what are the limits of this fluctuation? Why can Hershey bars go up to 30 cents, but not to thirty dollars?

As long as the objective situation stays more the same than different, what are the limits of the growth of PLP? How many can your club, section recruit in the next 6 months? How do you know?

### Topic 9. The particular and the general.

How did the *Challenge* editorial on the anti-nuclear movement apply this concept? (Reprinted in this issue.)

Can you understand your industry, school, child—or anything else—without knowing of the particular and the general?

**A final oldie but goodie—what is the "law of uneven development"? Give three examples.**

## Suggested Readings

### 1. ENGELS:

**Ludwig Feurbach**

Part II—Idealism and Materialism, pp. 20-32

Part IV—Dialectical Materialism, pp. 45-59

Appendix—Marx Theses on Feurbach

### 2. LENIN:

**Selected Works (Vols. 11 and 9)**  
The Three Sources and Three

Part I, Chap. XII (first 4 and last 3 pages)

Part II, Chap. XIII

5. MAO: On Practice

6. PL Magazine:

Dialectical Materialism, Vol.

10, No. 6, Oct. 1977

Can History Be a Science, Vol.

12, No. 4, Fall 1979

The Dialectics of Disease, Vol.

12, No. 2, Spring 1979

Component Parts of Marxism (Vol. 11, pp. 3-8)

Karl Marx (Vol. 11 pp. 13-18)

On the Significance of Militant

Materialism (Vol. 11, pp. 71-78)

On Dialectics (Vol. 11, pp. 81-85)

Once Again on the Trade Unions,

etc. (Vol. 9, pp. 66-67)

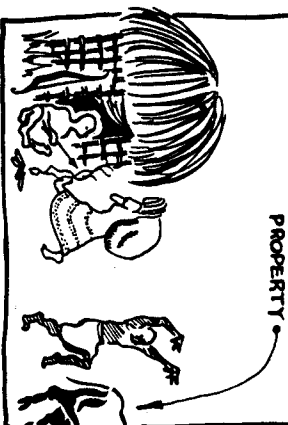
3. MAO: On Contradiction

4. ENGELS:

Anti-Duhring

# ROCKETS

(PRIMITIVE COMMUNISM)

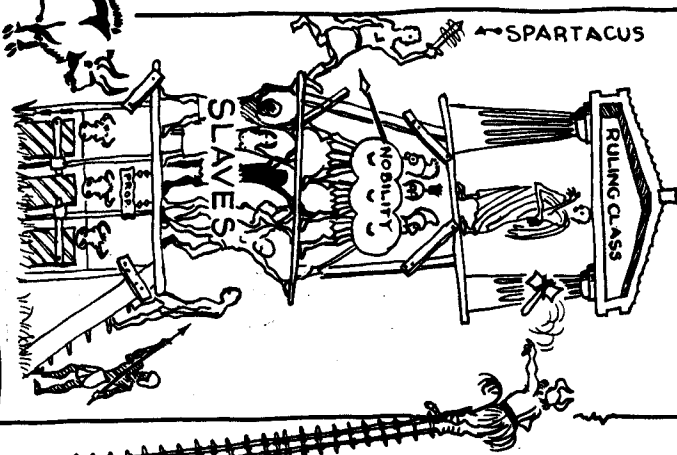


PROPERTY

TOTAL LABOR POWER

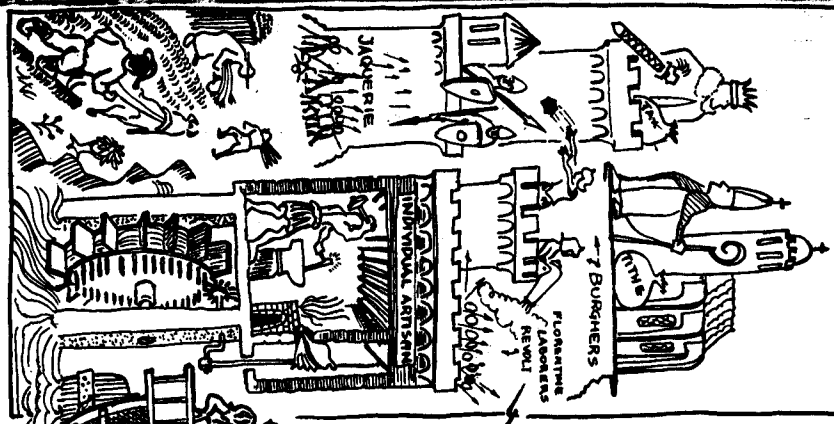
# ANTIQUITY

SPARTACUS

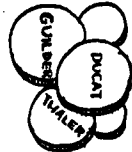


SURPLUS LABOR POWER  
(Necessary Labor Power  
[Ruling class took some of this too])

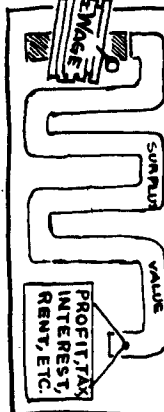
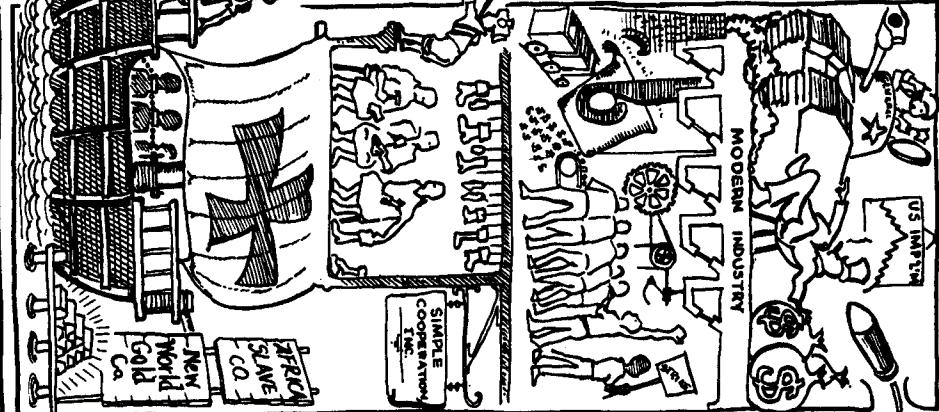
# Feudalism



SURPLUS VALUE  
NECESSARY VALUE  
(GAIN, THE RULING CLASS TAKES SOME)



# CAPITALISM



SOCIALISM