

Economic and Menshevik Determinism

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II.

Historic Inevitability

All the conditions and changes that have been referred to are reducible to two factors: the material conditions on the one hand and the mental attitude, understanding and interpretation corresponding to them and growing out of them, or as Marx has put it, "the material world transformed by mental assimilation."

Human action is *governed by two limitations*:

1. Objectively, by the inherent nature of things and physical conditions and their laws;
2. Subjectively, by those of the possibilities in nature which we are able to perceive, or of whose presence we are aware. The mere fact that a possibility exists does not make it available until we awaken to a realization of its existence.

The former is absolute, it is the limitation of human development not at a given time and place, but for any and all times. It belongs to the sphere of philosophy and metaphysics which treats of human activity according to its potential possibilities, and seeks to define the abstract theoretical boundary of human possibilities. The fact, for instance, that we cannot conceive of anything that is infinite but can deal only with things that are finite, is a case of this character.

But while the principles underlying human development can be dealt with in this abstract form, the development itself is a concrete historical process. "Man makes his own history but he does not make it out of whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand." His progress is based on conditions that

are *given* and his understanding of them; his action is determined and guided accordingly.

Furthermore, where the material conditions are the same in one case as in another, it does not imply of necessity that the history of the one must be the same as that of the other. For if this identity of conditions does not meet with a similar identity of mental interpretation, the course of action will be different, just as different individuals under the same set of conditions may do entirely different things.

The change from feudalism to capitalism in Japan for instance, was an entirely different process than in the case of England or France, and took an incomparably shorter time, for Japan was in a position to borrow and incorporate the industrial development of the western nations. "Had the Japanese been compelled to develop the stage of western civilization independently it would have taken surely hundreds of years, not to mention thousands, whereas they have done this in a few decades, just as they assimilated the civilization of China previously."

On the other hand, England was a pioneer in capitalist development, and under such conditions the rate of progress is necessarily slower. It is necessary to experiment, to try many ways before finding the best one, to make errors in order to know that they are errors, thus doing often the wrong thing in order to find the right way in the end; in short, it is the method of progress from the known to the unknown.

Japan was in a position to borrow the mental equipment of the western nations whereas the latter had to solve a similar situation with inferior knowledge. Under such circumstances, History is not a duplication of processes, it is evolution by a different path, and a shorter one. The changes which were historically inevitable in the case of the western nations, did not have to be adopted in Japan by repetition; she was in position to meet the same situation materially, with a superior capacity mentally.

Historic inevitability does not mean therefore that similar material conditions must lead to identical views, or must be