

# Modes of Production

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Common meanings of Mode of Production:

1. A specific type of economic structure.  
Specific forces of production and social relations of production.
2. The means by which surplus is appropriated.
  - a) Applies to exploitive modes of production.
  - b) Is a statement about the SRP.

# Modes of Production – Traditional Definitions

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## Slave Mode of Production

- 1) Two main classes are slaves and masters.
- 2) Master owns slave.

## Feudal Mode of Production

- 1) Two main classes are aristocracy (lords) and serfs.
- 2) Aristocracy owns the land.
- 3) Serfs are compelled by custom/obligation to provide surplus directly to lord.
- 4) Serfs possess some land on which they produce their own subsistence directly.
- 5) Production is primarily for use (of serf family and lord).

# Modes of Production – Traditional Definitions (con't.)

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## Capitalist Mode of Production

- 1) A system of commodity production (production for exchange)
- 2) The means of production are commodities and are owned by a distinct class of capitalists.
- 3) The workers own no means of production and are free of obligations.
- 4) Profit is the aim of production.

*#2 and 3 together give rise to the wage labor relation.*

# Defining Modes of Production without Legal Relations

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*[Distinguishing three modes of production based on 1) the specific power relation defining the relations of production, and 2) the mode of material reproduction of the producing class.]*

## **Slave Mode of Production**

1. Master controls producer's person for life.
2. Master directly provides subsistence to producer.

## **Feudal Mode of Production**

1. Lord compels producer to provide surplus product.
2. Producer produces own subsistence directly.

# Defining Modes of Production without Legal Relations (con't)

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## Capitalist Mode of Production

1. Capitalist controls access to means of production and disposes of product.
2. Producer receives subsistence through sale of labor-power.

## A Fourth (non-class) Mode of Production: Simple (independent) commodity production

1. Producers have a relation of free exchange to one another.
2. Producer obtains subsistence by production and exchange of commodities.

# Social Formation and Mode of Production

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Complexities and details not captured by concept of “mode of production”:

1. The actual relation between exploiting class and exploited class is complex and the particular characteristics of this relation vary over time and place.
2. More than two classes may exist in connection with a mode of production.
3. Two or more modes of production may coexist in the same society.

**Social Formation:** Refers to the complex of classes, class relations, and modes of production that exist at a given time and place.

# Class Relations

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**Claim:** In a mode of production, the exploiting class dominates in the political and ideological spheres as well as in the economic sphere. The exploiting class is also the **ruling class**.

Example:

“Bourgeois state”

“Bourgeois ideology”

## Class Relations (con't.)

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Two possible means by which the exploiting class can exercise political and ideological domination:

1) Members of exploiting class

A) occupy positions as state officials

B) directly formulate and disseminate the dominant ideology.

2) Processes operate that assure that, regardless of the class background or class connections of state officials and those who develop and disseminate ideology, the “interests” of the exploiting class

A) are protected by the state

B) are served by the dominant ideology.

*Note:* The main “interest” of the exploiting class is preservation of the existing social relations of production, although there may be other, potentially conflicting, interests of the exploiting class.



# Class Conflict

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Exploiting class domination is not absolute. There is also **class conflict**.

## Forms of Class Conflict:

1. Exploiting class versus exploited class.
2. New exploiting class versus old exploiting class.

Location of class conflict: in the political and ideological spheres as well as in the economic sphere.

## Role of class conflict: leads to

1. Change and development within a mode of production
2. Replacement of one mode of production by another

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle” (*Communist Manifesto*)

# Structural vs. Class Conflict Determination

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Claim: Class conflict is the means by which structurally-determined changes are worked out.

Interpreting the structural explanation of change in class conflict terms:

1. Change in economic base leads to change in superstructure: A potential new dominating class struggles with the old exploiting class, eventually defeating it and transforming the political institutions and the dominant ideology.
2. Change in forces of production leads to change in relations of production: The class that is the potential beneficiary of new relations of production struggles against the class that is beneficiary of the old relations of production, eventually gaining the power to establish new relations of production.

# Structural vs. Class Conflict Determination (con't.)

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## Independent Role of Class Conflict:

1. Class conflict plays a role in determining the timing and the character of the transition to a new mode of production.
2. Class conflict plays a role in determining the specific features of a mode of production.

# Class Analysis versus Methodological Individualism

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Historical materialism, and Marxist theory, regard classes and other groups as the basic actors in society.

Methodological individualism: An approach that assumes the only legitimate type of explanation of social phenomena is based on the behavior of individuals.

Rational Actor Model: Adds to methodological individualism the assumption that an individual's actions are determined by the pursuit of maximum utility through rational calculation.

Usual interpretation: Individual utility depends on an individual's consumption of economic goods and services including leisure.

# Marxist Critique of Methodological Individualism

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1. Groups do take actions in ways not reducible to individual actions: crowds, organizations, states.
2. If a more “micro” level of explanation is always superior, why stop at the individual person?
3. Individuals have conflicting desires and drives, just as groups have conflicting elements within them.
4. Collective action problem: How can collective action happen in view of the free rider problem?
  - a) Neoclassical answer: Compulsion, side-payments, irrational behavior.
  - b) Marxist answer: Human beings are social animals who tend to act as members of a group.

# Rationality – Individual, Altruistic, and Group

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## Individual Rationality

1. I will benefit if I undertake action X.
2. I want to do things that benefit me.
3. Therefore, I will do X.

## Altruism

1. Another individual will benefit if I undertake action X.
2. I want to do things that benefit another individual.
3. Therefore, I will do X.

## Group Rationality

1. Group Y will benefit if its members undertake action X.
2. As a member of group Y, I want to do things that benefit group Y.
3. Therefore, I will do X.

# Rationality – Individual, Altruistic, and Group

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Each type of rationality involves

- 1) intelligence and analysis of reality (recognition of causes and effects)
- 2) An aim or motivation
- 3) An act based on intelligence and motivation to achieve the desired end – that is, rationality.

# Mechanisms of Group Rationality

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1. Need to adopt an identity as part of a group.
2. Desire for the approval of others
3. Fear of ostracism
4. Moral sense
5. Capacity to feel guilt
6. Tendency to follow a leader



# Features of Transitions between Modes of Production

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1. **Internal factors:** The primary cause is internal factors, not external factors.
2. **Forces of production:** The development of the forces of production results in the old relations of production becoming a barrier to further development of the forces of production.
3. **No premature deaths:** The old mode of production will not pass away until there is no further possibility of development of the forces of production within that mode of production.
4. **No premature births:** A new mode of production will not arise until the preconditions for it develop and mature within the old mode of production.

# Features of Transitions between Modes of Production (con't.)

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5. **Class struggle:** Class struggle is the means by which a new mode of production replaces the old mode of production.
6. **Force:** The use of force plays a major role in the transition from one mode of production to another.
7. **Progress:** A transition from one mode of production to another represents progress.

## Transition: Three Problematic Cases

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1. The old RP are not yet fully exhausted, the preconditions for new RP have not yet matured, but new RP are established which replace the old RP.
2. The old RP are fully exhausted, but the preconditions for new RP have not yet matured.
3. The old RP are not yet fully exhausted, but the preconditions for new RP have matured.

# Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism

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## Feudalism decays:

### **Dobb:**

1. Low efficiency of production under feudal relations of production.
2. Growing demands for surplus from feudal lords.

### **Result:** Emergence of social formation with

1. Relatively independent peasantry paying money rents to landowners.
2. Growth of craft production outside of manors in towns.
3. Merchant class that is economically and politically strong.

# Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism (con't.)

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**Primitive Accumulation:** The development of capitalism, involving the creation of:

1. A class of property-less wage earners (by means of separating producers from their means of production)
2. A new wealthy class that is prepared to hire wage laborers (a capitalist class)

# Definitions of Socialism

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## **Traditional Definition:**

1. Social ownership of the means of production.
2. Economic planning guides the economy.
3. Production is for use.

## **Definition without Legal Relations:**

1. Producers collectively control access to the means of production, cooperate in the production process, and control disposal of the product through economic planning.
2. Producers obtain subsistence through socially planned distribution of output.

# Transition from Capitalism to Socialism

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1. Socialized forces of production are in contradiction to private appropriation.
2. Planning within the capitalist enterprise is in contradiction to the “anarchy” in exchange.
3. Capitalist accumulation produces the development of the proletariat.
4. The development of the proletariat and the capital-labor struggle lead to the development of the theory of “scientific socialism.”

# Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism in England

1. Internal Factors	Yes according to some accounts
2. Old SRP barrier to development of FP	Yes but prolonged, 2-stage transition
3. No premature deaths	Probable
4. No premature births	No -- capitalism first arose earlier
5. Class struggle	Yes
6. Force	Yes
7. Progress	Yes



# Transition from Capitalism to Socialism: USSR, China

1. Internal Factors	Important but war and national oppression also important
2. Old SRP barrier to development of FP	Possibly -- transition followed by rapid development
3. No premature deaths	No
4. No premature births	No, especially in China
5. Class struggle	Yes, plus other struggles
6. Force	Yes
7. Progress	Debated

# Assessment of Historical Materialism

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1. Change in superstructure (dialectically) determined by change in base.
2. Change in SRP (dialectically) determined by change in FP.
3. Class struggle plays key role.
4. Internal factors are necessary condition for transition but external factors can play a key role.
5. The “no premature deaths” and “no premature births” claims are not applicable to history.

## Assessment of Historical Materialism (continued)

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6. Class struggle plays a central role but other forms of group struggle also can play key roles.
7. Whether transitions bring progress is debatable.
8. Transitions follow complex path.
9. Need a supplementary framework for analyzing evolution within a mode of production.

# Is Capitalism the End of History?

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## **Reasons for a transition from capitalism to socialism:**

1. The capitalist mode of production has become an obstacle to further human progress and even the survival of civilization.
2. Socialism is potentially a superior mode of production for the sustainable development of the FP in way that improves human welfare.
3. Classes and groups resist exploitation and oppression.