Questions about Historical Materialism, Set #2.

Topic: Surplus, Exploitation, Class, Modes of Production

Definitions:

Surplus: Surplus product is gross economic output less the portion consumed by the producers and reproducers and less the portion that replaces the means of production used up.

Reproducers: Those who engage in labor to directly reproduce the producers of economic output (that is, raise children, prepare food in the home, etc.).

Exploitation: The appropriation by one group of the surplus product produced by another.

Class: a) a group with a particular relation to the process of production or distribution; b) a group with a particular relation to the processes of production and appropriation of surplus product.

Mode of Production: A particular type of economic structure. (Note: There are various meanings of this term in the Marxist literature.)

Questions:

1. Total Economic Output: What is meant by "total economic output" in the concept of surplus product? What is included and what is excluded?

2. Producers: Who are the producers of economic output? Who is included and who is excluded?

3. Reproduction across Generations: How is the support of children, necessary for the reproduction of an economic system over time, taken into account in the concept of surplus?

4. Living Standard of Producers/Reproducers: Should surplus be understood based some fixed level of consumption by producers/reproducers? Or should it be based on whatever the level of consumption of the producers/reproducers is at any particular time and place?

5. Exploitation and Domination: Does exploitation necessarily entail domination?

6. Modes of Production and Property Relations: Can modes of production (slave, feudal, capitalist, socialist/communist) be defined without reference to property relations?