

“Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.” Lenin, *What Is To Be Done*

CAPITALISM CAN'T BE REFORMED TO MEET OUR NEEDS

In the last dialectics column we asked when truly new things happen in history and when patterns repeat. Some people claim that history always repeats itself so that our struggles for communism must end up like the failed revolutions in Russia and China. The rest of this series will show that, in fact, communist revolution not only can succeed, but represents the only way to meet our needs.

In this column we will discuss laws of motion. It is necessary to understand what Marx called the “laws of motion of capitalism” if we are to know why the evils of capitalism must repeat. Our task now must be to change these laws of motion by mobilizing the masses for communist revolution.

A key feature that distinguishes a law from a mere pattern is its necessity, constraint, or limitation. A law of nature exists when natural causes force things to happen according to a certain general pattern.

Things that are not compatible with the law are forced not to happen. Newton’s Second Law of Motion, for example, says that a thing that moves must change speed or direction at a rate that is proportional to the force that acts on it. No other pattern of motion is possible, that is, “allowed”

by nature.

A second feature of a law is universality: a law is a pattern that always happens or never happens in a specific system and under specific conditions. What always happens might be only a tendency or statistical average, like the law of capitalism that the price of something is proportional—on the average—to the amount of labor it takes to make it. In any case, a law is a regularity that can be relied on.

The concept of a law of nature is different from a piece of legislation, but these things do have something in common. The common element between laws of nature or economics and laws made up by a government is constraint or limitation.

If the capitalist government makes a law, they force people to obey it by threats of jail, fines or death, even if capitalists disobey the law themselves. In physics, natural causes force or constrain the behavior of objects.

There is, however, a basic difference between these two kinds of law. In a law of nature or economics, the constraint is not imposed from the outside (like the cops and courts), but results from internal causal factors.

The law of the falling rate of profit, for exam-

ple, guarantees falling profit rates unless certain kinds of counteracting factors are present. This is one of the laws of motion of the capitalist system, and it results from changes in the technology of production that are driven by competition between capitalists. Nothing outside the economic relations of capitalism makes this law work, and it does not apply to other economic systems.

Unlike legislation, economic and natural laws operate whether or not we can formulate them in a language. Marx wrote that the apparently accidental events that occur in economic competition are actually carried out and regulated by inner laws. These laws only become comprehensible when many events are considered together and carefully analyzed.

The reason that we must consider laws when we talk about repetition in history is because they tell us which patterns must repeat. There is no general law that history always repeats. For particular systems, however, there are laws that determine that history does repeat in specific ways, like the capitalist system’s law of motion that economic crises must happen over and over again.

The next column will deal with arguments against the existence of the laws of motion.