

Concept of economic base and superstructure sociology essay



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In Marxist theory of history, existence of human life depends upon economic activity. This activity is determined by the combination of superstructure and substructure/base. The notion of Base-Superstructure is mainly concerned with the mode of production, forces of production, relations of production and social consciousness. It is situated on the scientific view that course of history socioeconomic formation can be predicted on the basis of material needs and conditions of a society. This scientific behavior of Marx economic theory distinguishes it from other theories. The object of this dichotomy is to explain the nature of economical production and human productive activity for survival. The distinction between them was initially stated in Part one of The German Ideology by Karl Marx and Engels in 1846. This economic theory of social system is so deterministic that limits and directs the human activity and ideology.

In order to know the dialectical activity of superstructure and base, it is necessary to understand the disposition of base because of all human economic activity is founded on it. The Great Soviet Encyclopedia (1979) states base as:

“ The base of a society is the totality of the historically determined relations of production.”

Base is divided into two parts: forces of production and relations of production. Productive forces are characterized as those phenomena which influence the substructure or economical base. These phenomena are important for the stability of economic base and nature of base/substructure

determines the superstructure. Thus both of these entities have dialectical character.

This antagonistic relation between base and superstructure gives revolution an uplift.

Individual becomes conscious when the other society fellows' struggle frames the economic transformation with the corresponding changes in superstructure and base. So, changes in cultural institutions such as law, art, education, philosophy and religion correspond with the prior changes in the economic substructure. It is the ideology that designs changes in the behavior of workers.

Conflicts in the productive forces and relations of production stimulate awareness in the owners of the laborers' class. And due to this conflict a social transition results in a new form of society. Mode/Method of production quantitatively and qualitatively changes. In this developed form forces and relations of production fit precisely together unless working class becomes fully aware of the exploitation of their rights, laboring activity and extra working hours. Old superstructure collapses and transforms in relation to substructure making the antagonistic relationship between the employers and employee.

The confrontation in the classes during the steadfast dialectical process in the history, arises the working class to take a stand against the ruling class, for example French Renaissance.

Productive forces which have been changing technologically throughout the history. Beginning from the primitive communism to the present day era, handmade simple tools replaced by complicated machines. Modes of labor and skill also transformed. Man-power utilized in the mills instead of crops and fields from the first step of extracting crude material to the shaping and recycling, employers learned to manage the skillful and useful workers accordingly. This framed the society into different relations of production. Social formation is settled on how the forces and relations of production fit together. So every society has its own relations. More developed the society, more complex the relations are. Primitive society, concept of collective ownership prevailed. the concept of private property introduced class differences, class society into commanding masters and submissive slaves, In feudalism into feudal lords and serfs and in capitalism into bourgeoisie and proletariats. In all these times producer has been used to produce capital goods which alienated him from his activity, production and surrounding. And the powerful gained control over the human laboring activity as well as the material goods. Though the dominant class is less in number than the dominated yet the money strengthens and legalize the authority of power-broker on police, media, law-abiding and other cultural institutions. This outspread mastery now rules the thoughts and beliefs of the citizenry. These beliefs are set by the ruling class according to their interests. The material base is headed by the ideological superstructure. These ideas cover political, theological, economical, legal, educational sides to justify divisions of class.

It is the duty of the subordinates to serve the superior class though the workers are waged for their struggles. In order to legitimize their rule, they must seem as saviors who possess best managerial capabilities, which necessitate their existence to refrain the society from chaos. Unconsciously, in the most cases, people adopt the servile attitude and work for authorities willingly. Religion, in the course of human history, has been a key factor in making agreeable mindset in favor of the political parties, for example, geocentrism could not be criticized in the 17th century because of the church priests. Marx says religion as “ opiate of the class” that dulls the mind.

From early childhood schooling to the university level, this consistent indoctrination is tutored. This Engels called as “ false consciousness”. The working class accepts the ideas as is, remains unaware of its interests thus suffers from alienation and exploitation.

Conclusion

They correlate when the productive activity is in interaction with needs. This means the mutual relations between the quantity and quality of the production. For example, in the industrial society, a huge man power working in the fields is replaced by the machines. Harvesters and tractors supersede the farmers. It made many skilful persons out-of-work. Their old knowledge does not correspond with the new technology. Quality of labor activity reduced and quantity of production increased. Now more food with better nutrition can be produced in lesser time. Skills of earlier stage of society do not coincide in their characteristics with skills of later stage.

Society is administered by laws not based on laws. Its base is economy. People work and earn to live. Their interests and skills determine their choice of occupation. A single person cannot live without a society. He/she is an integral part of society, its norms, culture and attitude. People live together because it fulfils their needs too. Thus, livelihood is the key factor of social formation. Law, politics, norms, and others are second prior to economy. These are tied in by the material needs and prevailing productive techniques.

This makes the whole mode of production. And consequently, change in the productive activity will precede an ideological change. Thus; this change in productive activity needs formulation of new laws or changes in prevalent legal commands of society to improve the status of life and agree with its requirements (cloth, food, dwellings). This is the classical example showing that superstructure reacts upon the change in the base.

Intellectual ability, judgment, ideals and high level of cognition distinguishes humans from other beings in the nature. Their faculty of reason helps them to be habituated with the surrounding. They do not migrate to other lands just because of the intense weather or other usual changes in the environment as most birds do. Instead, they generate their ways of sustenance. Unlike animals, they develop their living standards.

A human society is not just a mass of walking-talking bodies. They also have minds to think and evaluate with. Though they are combined in groups with common interests, it is natural that they develop a common understanding. Thinking is a subjective activity conditioned with biases and prior education.

Being a part of a society, individuals think on different grounds. Every man is unique in his nature and builds his philosophy of life as he sees it. This philosophy is detrimental if imposed on others forcefully. Like elders in families, every society needs a body of leadership capable enough to maintain law and order. This part of society is called superstructure in historical materialism. Economic base is capped with the ideological superstructure.

Forces of production regulate social relations of production not the other way around. These forces are