

Socialism

Utopian & Scientific

Friedrich Engels



Questions for discussion groups

1. Why does Engels describe the early socialists Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen as Utopian Socialists? What is their significance?
2. Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen and Hegel were all contemporaries of the French revolution. Is this a coincidence, and if not why not?
3. What was Hegel's ground-breaking philosophical contribution to Marxist thought? And why was it incomplete?
4. Why is modern materialism essentially dialectical in Engels words?
5. Engels discusses dialectics in contrast to vulgar, or metaphysical, thought. When discussing similar points, Trotsky draws the comparison between a motion picture and its relation to a still photograph. What point are both Trotsky and Engels illustrating? (Trotsky, ABC of materialist dialectics, 1939)
6. Can historical processes be successfully interpreted in a non-dialectical manner?
7. What is the essential driving force in the development of every class struggle throughout recorded history?
8. How does a commodity differ from the product of labour of an individual in the pre-capitalist era?
9. What does Engels mean when he writes: 'but the bourgeoisie...could not transform these puny means of production into mighty productive forces without transforming them, at the same time, from the means of production of the individual into social means of production only workable by a collectivity of men'? (Section 3, Page 33)

10. Engels describes production becoming socialised, yet appropriation of surplus value remaining in the possession of the capitalist class. What does he mean by this, and what are the consequences?
11. What are the economic consequences of the ‘compulsory laws of competition’ (Section 3, Page 38) between rival capitalists and how do they manifest themselves? Is it possible for the capitalists in specific industries to neutralise these challenges by forming monopolies?
12. During economic crises ‘the mode of production is in rebellion against the mode of exchange’ according to Engels and Marx. (Section 3, Page 43-44). What does Engels mean by this and how does this clash manifest itself particularly in periods of crisis?
13. Capitalism, by its nature, draws into production and wage-labour increasing layers of society. What impact does this process of proletarianisation have? Why do Marxists argue that the working class has a central role to play in the socialist transformation of society?
14. In section 3, page 47, Engels talks about large parts of the productive forces being owned by the capitalist state and adds it is ‘not the solution of the conflict, but concealed within it are the technical conditions that form the elements of that solution.’ What does he mean?
15. With privatisation being the dominant strategy of capitalists internationally over the last 30 years, has Engels’ analysis been invalidated? Under what conditions can this process of privatisation be reversed?
16. What does Engels mean when he writes (Section 3, Page 50), ‘The first act by virtue of which the state really constitutes itself the representative of the whole of society – the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society – this is, at the same time its last independent act as a state’?
17. In the same paragraph, Engels criticises the idea of a ‘free state’, a formulation included in the 1870s draft programme of the German Social Democracy, which both he and Marx severely chastised. Why is the idea of a free people’s state an incorrect position for Marxists to hold? Does this only apply within a capitalist society? What about after capitalism is overthrown? (See Marx’s ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’)