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FUNDAMENTAL PROPOSITION OF THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

The Manifesto being our joint production, I consider myself bound to state that the fundamental proposition which forms its nucleus, belongs to Marx. That proposition is: That in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch; that consequently the whole history of mankind (since the dissolution of primitive tribal society, holding land in common ownership) has been a history of class struggles, contests between exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes; that the history of these class struggles form a series of evolutions in which, now days, a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class--the proletariat--cannot attain its emancipation from the way of the exploiting and ruling class-- the bourgeoisie--without at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinctions and class struggles.

From Engels' PREFACE to the Communist  
Manifesto added Jan 30, 1888

ECONOMIC DETERMINISM

"In the social production of their means of existence men enter into definite, necessary relations which are independent of their will.... The mode of production of the material means of existence conditions the whole process of social, political, and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness....With the change in the economic foundation the whole vast superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed."

Marx, A Contribution to the Critique  
of Political Economy (1859)