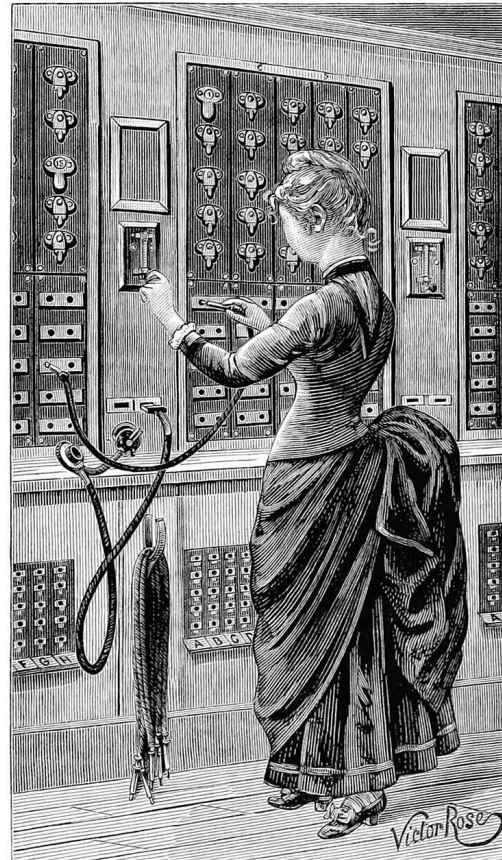


# MASS Educational Program

*Theories, Concepts, and Key Vocabulary*



**Week 3: Dialectical Materialism**

**02/01/25**

# Trinity

## Frameworks for Understanding the World

**Idealism:** The belief that history is driven through ideological phenomena

- All material conditions are a result of some ideological or theoretical instance
- Examples of ideologies are legal systems, social strife, laziness, race, philosophy, religion, spirituality
- **A MORAL FAILING.**

**Materialism:** material reality is primary, it shapes our thoughts, ideas, and life

- All ideological instances are the result of material condition
- Examples are economic ownership, exchange value, commodities, distribution of labor
- **A SOCIETAL/SYSTEM FAILURE.**

## Analyze - The Arab World

An **idealist** would see the Middle East “on fire”, and say their conditions are a result of their laws, government, religious views, backward legal system, etc, ultimately reasons with an internal issue

A **materialist** would see their conditions are incidental to their material conditions, which include several hundred years of violence, colonialism, resource extraction, bombings, and genocide.

*Idealism example: Using religious analysis explaining why Islam is bad as a justification for colonization of Islamic countries*

## Analyze - Palestine

Israeli officials and American officials have made admissions saying how they want to be developed and turn Gaza into a resource, which is a very materialist analysis of what they want.

### **Material Analysis:**

- The reason they want to colonize that land (Palestine) is for oil reserves that were discovered off the coast of Gaza a year before al-Aqsa Flood
- The material conditions of Palestinians being under apartheid for 76 years is what created their resistance in all of its forms.

### **Idealism Weaponized:**

- In criticizing Palestinian Liberation Zionists cite perceived ideological miscomings like that they practice a backward religion, follow Sharia law, or are terrorists
- Israelis can't fathom that Palestinians have the right to violence, "just protest peacefully" as if Palestinian people haven't been treated extremely violently for the last 76 years

## **Analyze - A Houseless Person**

An **idealist** would believe laziness causes homelessness, all of the fault is on the person and their bad decision-making.

A **materialist** would ask what external factors are causing this person to be homeless, like crazy high rent prices, overpolicing, or being kicked out

## **Historical Materialism**

The philosophical idea that our material conditions determine all other aspects of life

- Historical change is driven primarily by material conditions.
- Examples are economic systems, societal structures, technological advancements, means of production

Scientific Socialism analyzes the world by understanding the relationship between Materialism and Idealism, the relationship they have with one another, and also the effect that they have on our lives.

# Shawky

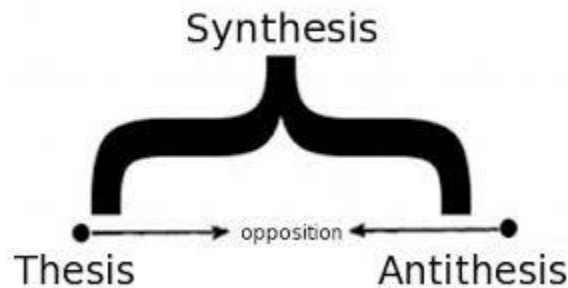
## Dialectics

- A strategy or form of argumentation/ logical reasoning that happens across 3 main philosophers/philosophical movements
- The foundation of revolutionary Marxism
- Started long before materialism or Marxism

### Plato – Ancient Greek Period

Claims 3 things will happen in a verbal conversation - based in science

1. THESIS – any claim or argument that a person might make
2. ANTITHESIS – a contradiction to the thesis; an opposing argument
3. SYNTHESIS – a modified argument that synthesizes both views into a new claim that is reasonably acceptable to the people in the room
  - a. Includes elements from both thesis and antithesis
  - b. Also includes the struggle/conflict between both sides



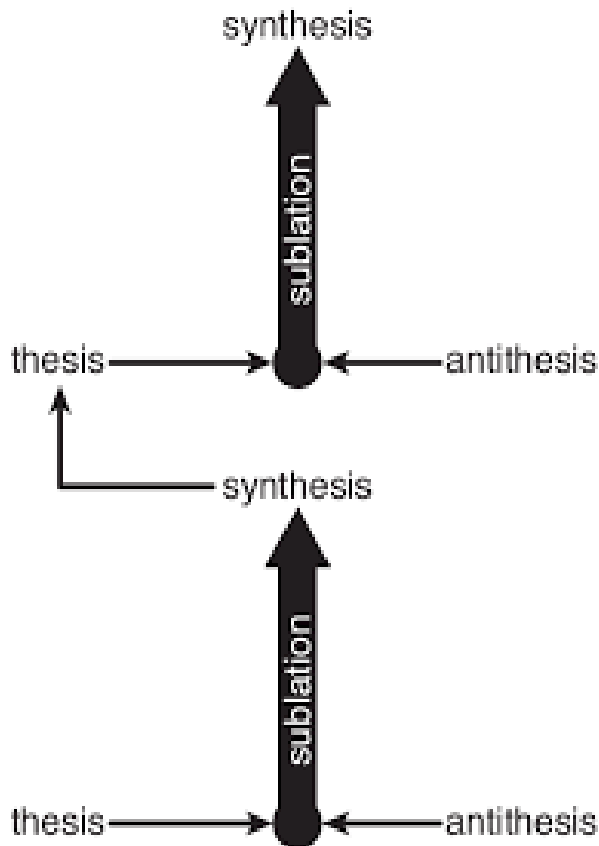
### Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel – Early 1800s, Germany

Claims this occurs on the world stage, not just in conversation

- Believed historical development came about through ideological conflict (and resolution), from different outlooks on the world.
- Every round in dialectical reasoning will bring us closer to absolute truth, absolute godliness, which Hegel calls *the sublime*
- Include NEGATION as part of dialectics, the ANTITHESIS coming from the negation of the thesis. Important in worker's movement for example, they have to be negating everything about the oppressive system they are trying to overcome

## Dialectical Progression – Cause and Effect (and effect)

The effects become the new causes. The original conflict is resolved with a SYNTHESIS, which then becomes the new THESIS. Another ANTITHESIS is introduced, and the progression continues infinitely.



Whether it's the THESIS or the ANTITHESIS, one will have a heavier role in the final SYNTHESIS. (Primary)

Similar to how the ANTITHESIS must always be a negation of the THESIS. (Ex. THESIS: capitalism, antithesis can't be an oligarchy, has to be opposite like communism, the synthesis will come out of the conflict resolution of the two extremes)

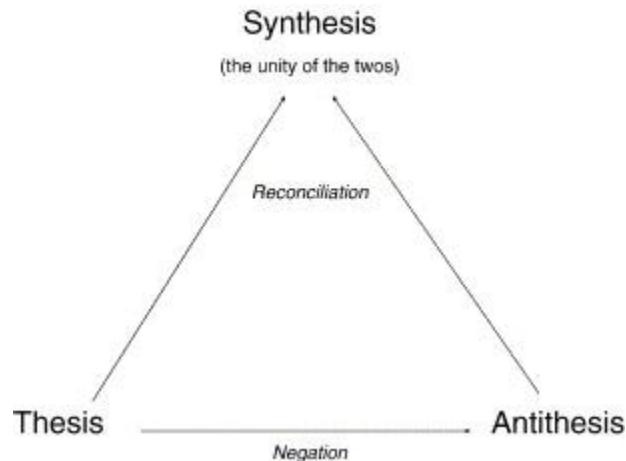
Immanuel Kant's 1795 piece on Perpetual Peace was the foundation for the UN and the League of Nations.

## Contradictions

Contradictions between American liberalism and Chinese socialism show historical development being driven through an ideological battle between those two historical forces.

Materialists don't see the contradiction between China and America as primarily an ideological conflict, moreso the way those countries are literally organized on the economic system, the levels of wealth distribution versus how well force be distributed

Bottom left of the triangle is the THESIS: the original argument made during the point of the conversation. This is in **contradiction** (NEGATION) with the ANTITHESIS. Both go up and you have your SYNTHESIS



## CONTRADICTION = NEGATION = STRUGGLE

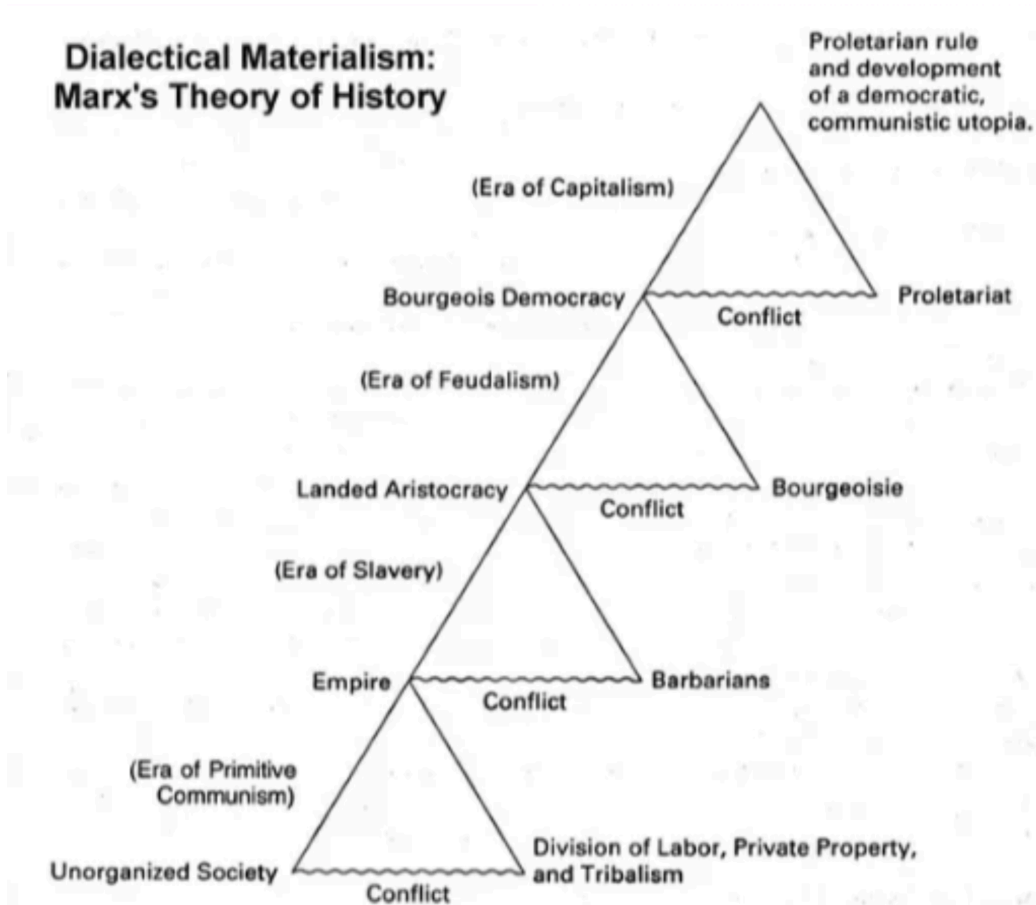
### Compromise vs. Synthesis

- Compromise is both sides coming together peacefully and unifying, essentially an agreement
- Synthesis, as argued by Marx, is a forced compromise if anything, because it contains elements from both parties.
- The CONTRADICTIONS between the two will exist in the SYNTHESIS, which makes it *inherently contradictory*
- the final goal might be separate from the two starting positions.

### Marx Input

- He views the proletariat as the ANTITHESIS in the world stage of dialectics, and the bourgeoisie as the THESIS.
- In this example, the THESIS/Bourgeoisie will establish a dictatorship, become the primary (more influential party), so when revolution/another ideology arises any kind of SYNTHESIS will have to contain parts of the THESIS in it.
- To avoid idealism, he recognizes we're not going to have a utopian communist society or any socialist society born out of capitalism.

- Marxism asserts that we're going closer and closer to an economic form of organization; communism.
- When history is progressing this way it's constantly being pulled in ways that are antithetical to that movement



*Diagram showing an example of the thesis–antithesis–synthesis growth upwards, as each synthesis becomes the new thesis as society progresses more to represent the proletariat*

## **Idealist Analysis:**

- ‘Pre-History was the most gruesome of living conditions **because** there was no forms of education, government/ legality’
- Thomas Hobbes and other early nationalist liberals wrote that any state without a government is short brutish, and violent
- History develops through these contradictions that take on higher and higher forms

## **Example In Revolutions:**

Hegel and Marx were obsessed by the **French Revolution**. The French, American, and Haitian Revolutions were all liberal revolutions, though the Haitian Revolution had the element of free enterprise for formerly enslaved people. These revolutions were crucial because they introduced nationalist principles within government, replacing the monarchical system that liberals opposed.

Example: America Right Now

- Capitalism the THESIS (in USA)
- Communism is the ANTITHESIS.
- Socialism is the SYNTHESIS

Example: French Revolution

- Monarchical Feudalism was the thesis.
- Liberal Revolutions were the antithesis.
- The synthesis aimed toward capitalist democracy (nearly socialist), with figures like Robespierre pushing for radical land reforms (for the capitalist class)

Even though the American Revolution fought for "freedom," it ultimately included the right to own slaves, showing its limitations. However, Marx recognized these revolutions as necessary historical movements that pushed societies toward redistribution, social equality, and brought them closer to socialism.

## **Dialectics and Black Liberation in the U.S.**

The progression of black liberation in the U.S. follows a dialectical progressive pattern but has never achieved true liberation. Instead, each stage of progress (one form of oppression) led to a modified, new form of oppression:

- Chattel slavery → Jim Crow → Mass incarceration → War on Drugs
- Each step was marginally better but not emancipatory.



- C.L.R James – black Marxism– says very clearly the evolution of black liberation in America has never opened up the possibility of true liberation.

Cedric Robinson and Clara James argue that this occurs because of white supremacy continually adapting in response to black liberation movements.

## **Liberals**

In U.S. politics, liberals often compromise rather than synthesize, leading to stagnation. This pattern is shown in how liberals negotiate with conservatives, allowing policies to shift right-wards over time. Some perceive this as progress, but it just reinforces the existing power structures instead of challenging them. For example:

Kamala Harris was so scared that America is going to become fascist, yet then she's shaking hands during his inauguration, along with Obama

## **Highlighting Contradictions**

Marxists emphasize contradictions within capitalism to push for systemic change – Trump and his administration were/are horrible and they also forced many to confront contradictions about our government they previously ignored/ weren't affected by. We can acknowledge that his presidency heightened class and racial consciousness in ways that liberal administrations often suppress.

Capitalism is emergent of two contradictions, containing within itself both feudalism and oligarchy, meaning the fascist, feudal, or otherwise oligarchical elements are never fully eradicated.

## Principled Negation

In dialectics, thesis and antithesis must be principled and contradictory, meaning they must directly challenge the capitalist structure and the elements that exist. It's not enough to reject something arbitrarily (taxes are unfair); negation must be rooted in opposing capitalism itself.

- If negation is not complete, it leads to reformism rather than true transformation.
- Partial negations allow capitalism to adapt and persist, maintaining its internal contradictions.
  - Example: well-meaning politicians with the intention of liberation, learns to play the game of “what can I get done in the immediate” – this only stunts real liberatory change

The goal is not just slow incremental change but the structural negation of capitalism and oppressive systems, leading to a new synthesis that eliminates exploitation rather than modifying it.

- Movements must demand liberation and nothing less.
- Even when demands are unmet, they push the struggle further forward rather than reinforcing the status quo.

*Is voting in your local mayoral race being a sellout?*

## Reformism

Reformism enacts change by maintaining the preeminence of the existing system rather than challenging it.

- Example: Political parties in New York may dislike the mayor but continue to engage with the office rather than negating its existence altogether.
- Electoral politics disrupt progress rather than advancing it.
- Material conditions shape ideology—regardless of personal beliefs, a politician must conform to the system once in power.

*The position comes with material incentives that contradict revolutionary politics - Politicians are bound by the interests of their donors*

**Example:** real estate-funded politicians will always favor and sponsor new developments, regardless if there's any benefit to the local community, and ignore any dissent

## **You Can't Change The System; It Changes You.**

- 'Radical' politicians often start with strong values but gradually compromise, leading to total assimilation.
  - Left-leaning figures like AOC and Bernie Sanders have compromised under the pressures of the system.
  - Obama was talking about the 'long-legged socialist' when he was an undergrad, irrelevant now
- Voting for an office (or running for it) legitimizes the structures of oppression that keep us oppressed
- The issue is not just bad politicians, but the economic structure that makes the position inherently reactionary, no matter who is in office.
- Similar to the "good cop" belief – people who try to fix systems from the inside out – police who try this either get fired, killed, or assimilate into the system

## **Representation In Oppressive Systems ≠ Liberation.**

- Arabs in the NYPD or Palestinian officers in Israel doesn't change the nature of those systems.
- Political representation can be used to pacify oppressed groups rather than challenge power -
  - The election of Kamala Harris may look progressive, but it only extends the life of an oppressive system and harms revolution.
- Some argue it prevents harm, but voting ultimately delays necessary confrontation with the system
- The illusion of progress through representation confuses people about what true liberation looks like.

## **Foundations of Dialectical Materialism**

Marx and Engels developed dialectical materialism as a response to Hegelian dialectics, which was based in idealism. Hegel believed history was driven by contradictions between ideas, where a thesis and antithesis produced a synthesis

- Example: Christianity vs. Islam synthesizing into secularism (secularism is opposed to both Islam and Christianity)

Marx rejected this, arguing:

- contradictions are fundamentally material, not ideological
- history is shaped by economic organization, labor market, and resource distribution.
- Material contradictions, not ideological conflicts, drive historical change.

### **Internal Contradictions**

- Conflicts that occur within an economic system, such as the struggle between the proletariat and capitalist class in the U.S.
- Example: in the U.S., Manufactured culture wars, race tensions, etc, to obfuscate (hide) the primary contradiction: class
- Internal contradictions drive history forward in a way that can produce a homegrown socialist effort in the U.S.
  - The wealth gap is so high (along with rent and eggs and health insurance and the subway) so the people affected are growing a class-conscious

### **External Contradictions**

- Conflicts arise between competing national economic systems
  - Example: U.S. capitalism vs. Chinese socialism.
- External contradictions drive history forward by (for example) organizing the American economic system against the Chinese economic system
  - Example: Space Race, a nuclear arms competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War resulting in the development of rocket technology.

## Vladimir Lenin:

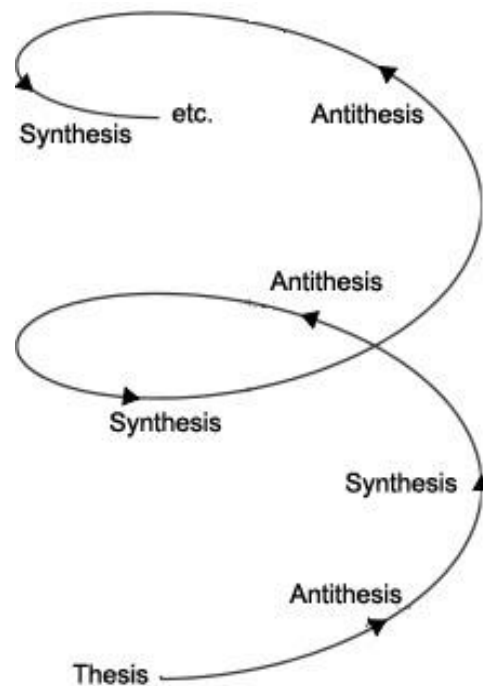
### What Is To Be Done (1902), On the Question of Dialectics (1915)

- Historical change does not happen smoothly but through revolutionary struggles caused by material contradictions:
- Revolutionaries can't passively observe the contradictions, but must actively work to accelerate them.

## Spiral of Historical Development

Revolutionary progress is not linear but moves like a spiral – constantly approaching but never fully reaching communism.

- Lenin explained history as a series of contradictions that lead to new syntheses, which then become new contradictions.
- Each revolution carries remnants of the past system, requiring further struggle and contradictions
- Example: In the U.S., cycles of anti-Black economic systems continue evolving but never fully erase oppression.



## **Mao Zedong: Cultural Revolution + Role of Ideology**

Mao showed that some contradictions persist even after a socialist revolution. While socialism transforms material conditions, ideological remnants of past systems like racism, sectarianism, etc, continue to influence society and material conditions.

- Sectarian (religious) divides within China didn't just disappear with a socialist revolution, they needed a cultural revolution to change the impact race and religion had on the material system
- Ideology, while secondary to material conditions, plays a crucial role in shaping social structures
  - Feudal Racial hierarchies in China continued after the revolution and required active struggle to end.

## **Dialectical Materialism vs. Simple Materialism**

**Simple Materialism** suggests that changes in material conditions result in ideological shifts

**Dialectical Materialism** shows a mutual relationship: material conditions create ideology, then ideology influences material conditions; a back-and-forth relationship.

## **Race and Frantz Fanon**

Race was initially invented by the capitalist need to exploit labor, resources, or land from Africa, colonize and enslave African workers, etc.

- Race is an ideological phenomenon, a social construct, caused by something in the material world
- Racism has shaped material realities, such as economic and political structures (systematic racism, colonial practices)
- Fanon's analysis of anti-blackness shows colonizing and subjugating will result in the making of an ideology to support that material need
  - Example: American propaganda attributing negative and violent qualities to African American people as justification for their oppression, fear, and anti-black violence

## Revolutionary Optimism and Scientific Socialism

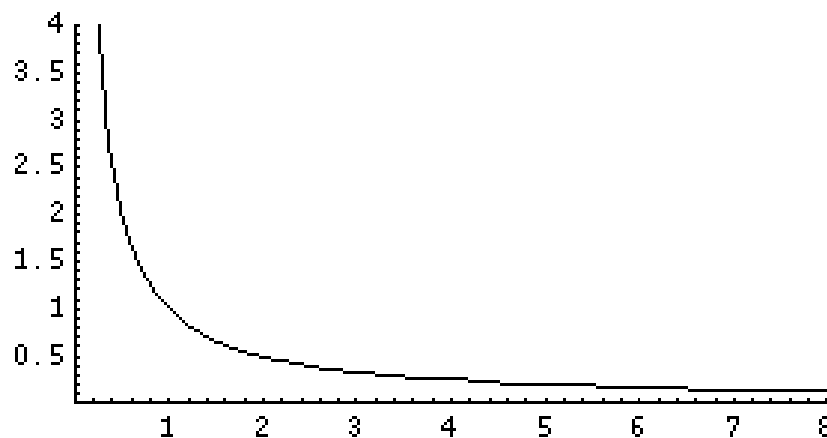
Marxist historical analysis is rooted in Scientific Socialism, it's based on patterns of material struggle rather than utopian idealism

- Revolutions may seem to fail, but they push society closer to socialism by deepening contradictions within capitalism.
  - The French Revolution had to happen like 18 fucking times.
- Socialism emerges from capitalism's contradictions – it is not an abstract idea but an inevitable development from material
  - In each historical progression, we get closer and closer to communist society
- The role of revolutionaries is to accelerate this process, not to wait for conditions to "perfectly" align.
- It's revolutionary because we have room to imagine a better future by analyzing the past

## Visualizing Revolutionary Progress

1. An asymptote graph, where society (the line) gets closer and closer to communism but never reaches a "perfect" state (the axis)
  - a. There's never a point where the lines will intersect, never a point where we will reach perfect communism
2. A dialectical progression where each stage creates new contradictions, requiring continuous struggle (the spiral)

There will always be a socialist system that has vestiges of the capitalist system that came before it



# Liz

## **Contradictions in Society:**

- Internal contradictions exist within our societal structures, where different systems or ideologies conflict with one another.
- Examples of contradictions:
  - Political parties (Democratic and Republican) often contradict themselves with reformist policies.
  - Homelessness: A contradiction within a meritocratic society that teaches if you work hard enough, you can succeed, yet homelessness still exists.

*Contradictions push history forward -  
we are living in a world of very heightened contradictions*

## **Materialism and Contradictions:**

- Material conditions (economic systems, governmental structures, etc.) shape and define the contradictions we experience in society.
- Homelessness is not merely a result of individual choices, but a reflection of systemic inequality (high rents, over-policing, etc.).

## **Dialectics:**

- The method of engaging with opposing views to find new solutions, facilitates the evolution of ideas.
- **Dialectical process:**
  - Goes beyond the 2D linear cause-and-effect thinking, to a 3D dialogical process that allows for creativity and growth.
  - Contradictions drive progress: Without contradictions, there would be no dialectical movement forward. They push society to evolve and change.
- A process that facilitates conversations and understanding, pushing society forward through creative dialogue.



## **Materialist Analysis of Contemporary Issues:**

- A materialist explanation of homelessness highlights systemic issues, such as inequality, rather than solely blaming individuals.
- Examples of contradictions:
  - Wildfires and the rise in homelessness are material issues exacerbated by systemic inequalities.

*Studying dialectics might seem like common sense, but understanding it is essential to staying grounded in revolutionary goals, especially when trying to analyze historical movements and social change.*

## **Mutual Aid**

- Mutual aid addresses contradictions in society through principle action: Providing essential resources like food in areas where no one else is.
- While mutual aid may not directly confront the system, it brings contradictions to the forefront when met with repression
  - Police intervention with free food distribution?
  - Questions being raised – why don't people have these things
- Contradictions can be resolved through principled, collective action to challenge systemic issues without direct confrontation

# Discussion

“Masses of people are never organized, they're not even organizable. What happens is that as repression increases people must do things to survive.”

– H Rap. Brown

## Repression as a Tool for Mobilization:

- The revolutionary cannot mobilize or radicalize the masses, only repression can organize the masses to fight the revolution.
  - People are more likely to care about politics and have an opinion when the policies affect parts of their life
- Repression can serve as a tool to mobilize the masses, as it often showcases contradictions within the system right in front of them
- The role of the Vanguard Groups is to bring the repression down before the timetable that has been set up by The System runs out
- The revolutionary struggle is a reaction to the repression that will be brought down on the programs organized by the Vanguard party to serve people.
- Repression leads to mobilization: By exposing contradictions, repression can spark further resistance and action.
  - Example: An educational protest or public event that exposes contradictions within institutional support for policies. The institution's response can amplify resistance.

*Our responsibility to get the masses involved/ the way to get the masses involved is to bring the repression down. Execute political programs out of necessity, so then out of necessity, the system has to repress them. By doing this, you directly involve the masses of the people*

*You can't hope to organize the masses of the people – oppression organizes the people. Capitalism makes more revolutionaries than I ever could make.*

## **FIT Flea Market - Example**

- Students can reserve a table and sell clothing, accessories, etc. (FITSJP had a table with proceeds to Palestine)
- We sold T-shirts with a print of Leila Khalid, a Palestinian revolutionary, to spread awareness about her and what she's done
- Repression was expected because of the contradictions; Zionist parents calling the school to complain we are terrorists
- School ended up shutting down the entire flea market, for everyone, it became a big scandal
  - Students not previously involved were exposed to how institutions react to opposition.
- A rally we had the following week was the largest in the history of the school; The repression mobilized students and led to an encampment.

**Analysis** – The principle of getting the students (masses) involved in the repression so they are able to see the contradictions; this school that boasts “unconventional minds” actually doesn't care about anything but money and just wants to keep the peace

**Hypothetical** – *How can this principle be used to increase student involvement in future semesters, especially with decreased mobilization?*

- a super public teach-in, flyering situation, post stuff in the courtyard, public street, and banners, on a pretty well-received topic (ICE-Watching, Immigration Policy) with intent of being repressed
- Know Your Rights teach-in, that the school theoretically should support, as they often send out emails feigning support for their immigrant or undocumented students; heightens contradiction
  - Expose their main goal as not to protect students, or fight fascism, but to keep the peace

Mutual Aid doesn't result in the same direct confrontations with government/institutions as with union and tenant organizing or strikes.

There's no real direct confrontation or radicalization, which is why *\*this\** educational program is so crucial for MASS

## Vocabulary

**Accelerationism** – Accelerationism enact change using heightened contradictions and pushing societal conditions to their extreme, expecting for a revolutionary response

- The risk of accelerating contradictions is that it can lead to a reactionary revolution, rather than a socialist one
  - Bourgeois Revolutions like the French or American revolutions
- A reactionary revolution may not address the root material conditions but instead maintain capitalist systems in new forms.

**Historical Materialism** – Socialism is built brick-by-brick, cannot be achieved by accelerating contradictions alone.

**Revisionism** – The process of altering Marxist theory that prioritizes modernization and adapting to capitalist frameworks instead of the struggle for socialism

- Lenin rejects this, claims we cannot build socialism through legal reform, we can't build socialism from within

**Reformism** – Reformism enacts change by maintaining the preeminence of the existing system rather than challenging it.

**Trade Union Politics** – Lenin defines trade union politics as focusing only on immediate worker necessities (EX. higher wages), which won't lead to socialism because they don't challenge the system itself.

**Adventurism** – Premature Revolution; rushing into revolution and rebellion without groundwork and local support will lead to failure

*Accelerating contradictions can push society to the extreme (like voting for Trump), but a strategy must be well-prepared with the necessary resources and manpower to back it up.*

## **Raising Contradictions Through Actions:**

It's important to organize responses to repression as well as regular actions. Reactionary actions can still raise contradictions

### **Example: 1980s Divestment from South Africa Apartheid**

- African National Congress & Black Liberation Army called for American Students to take action to aid with divestment from South African Apartheid
  - The ask was to convince universities to arrest students - demand something liberal enough and face repression
- The goal was to expose American universities as part and partial to the logic of capitalist domination & apartheid
  - The universities would rather repress, and in some cases arrest and prosecute students (that they claim to care about) instead of divesting their funding from south african apartheid
  - Divestment was never the feasible goal, moreso a vehicle to show the contradictions of american universities/institutions

## **Three Key Contradictions in American Society:**

1. **Partisan Divisions:** People will agree with something based on if it's supported by a political party or figure
  - a. Example: AOC's suddenly anti-deportation again, after she was silent during the Biden administrations deportations
2. **Collective Individualism:** Americans think the absence of a bad behavior means they are a morally good person. If someone doesn't say racist things, they're considered a good person –which ignores the systemic nature of racism.
3. **Economic Pressures:** Overwork and underpayment lead to people not being able to meeting their basic needs, which and makes it hard to discover and address systemic contradictions.
  - a. We don't have proper mutual aid structure for acceleration to not result in the disproportionate harm and death to historically targeted demographics and people targeted under the current and former administration.

## **Mutual Aid:**

- To start to address these contradictions, the build-up of strong, reliable, connected, and expansive mutual aid networks is needed. This can help support the masses as contradictions get higher and higher
- Although mutual aid's primary purpose is to address immediate material needs, it also has a secondary role in raising contradictions by confronting the systemic issues.

## **The Offensive Fight Against Fascism:**

- Many view the fight against fascism as defensive, but it's actually an offensive struggle against capitalism.
- Liberalism and Liberal Capitalism ultimately devolves into fascism
- Fascism is a natural habit that Liberalism takes on under stress

*When you see people call themselves revolutionary always talking about destroying, destroying, destroying, but never talking about building or creating, they're not revolutionary. They do not understand the first thing about revolution. It's creating. - Kwame Ture*

- True revolutionaries don't focus on destruction but on building and creating alternatives to capitalism, support for those who it hurts
- Creating systems and structures that poke holes in their oppression, union organizing, are all offensive gestures against capitalism
- Build the things we need to survive, the things we need to collectively organize, take the offensive and bring fight to the capitalists, where they will retaliate
- Repression will inevitably follow, but that's when you have to defend your project, party, organization, etc, and confront the state