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The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man

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Mehring Books is pleased to make available to readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* Frederick Engels' important essay, *The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man*.

In this pamphlet, written over 130 years ago, Engels presents his understanding of the key factors in human evolution, using the dialectical materialist method and what little was then known about human physical and cultural evolution. Engels' insights have been substantially confirmed by the fossil and archaeological records.

Engels specifically identifies the adoption of bipedality (i.e. walking on two feet) as the key initial step in the differentiation between the human lineage and that of other apes. Bipedality, he contends, freed the hands from the constraints imposed by their use in locomotion and allowed the development of a higher degree of dexterity, which was essential for the manufacture of sophisticated tools.

One of the most important points made by Engels is that labor was primary in human evolution and the development of human intelligence. He proposed that the initial steps in the manufacture and use of tools generated the evolutionary drive toward abstract thought. Engels was in a distinct minority. The predominant view among anthropologists at the time he wrote and for decades thereafter was that intelligence came first, generating the expectation that an enlarged brain would evolve before other anatomical modifications. This latter view has been definitively refuted and Engels' view confirmed by the fossil record.

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