

*P. F. Wright*

# THE MEANING OF MARX



**Edited by SIDNEY HOOK**

**With an introduction by  
STERWOOD EDDY**

3 [redacted] of turmoil has proved that Karl Marx is one of  
political philosophers of all times. Few people  
his works and fewer understand him. Here, in  
brief, is an introduction, an explanation and an intelligent  
commentary on his work as it is critically understood by  
some of the most prominent thinking men of our time.

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THE  
MEANING OF MARX

*A SYMPOSIUM*

BY

BERTRAND RUSSELL

JOHN DEWEY

MORRIS COHEN

SIDNEY HOOK

SHERWOOD EDDY

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THE  
MEANING OF MARK

A SYMPOSIUM

BY  
BERTRAND RUSSELL  
JOHN DILLON  
MORRIS COHEN  
SIDNEY HOOK  
SHERWOOD BUDY

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## FOREWORD

THERE is a growing interest in the study of Karl Marx. Russia's series of five-year plans and the recognition of the Soviet Union by President Roosevelt have turned many eyes to that country in order to study and to understand the great experiment there and the philosophy of Marx which it seeks to embody. Again, there is already the threat of another world war before we have recovered from the last one, and another such catastrophe may threaten the destruction of our civilization or drive other countries into a communist dictatorship similar to that resulting from the Russian Revolution of 1917.

For several years we have been in the depths of a world depression and even before we have made a complete recovery economists threaten us with a series of such crises as the inevitable result of the capitalist system, at a time when we are forced to wonder whether we could survive another such depression without revolution. Therefore, it is pertinent to ask how far the predictions of Marx regarding depressions, war and revolution are being fulfilled, or whether they need to be revised in the light of recent history.

Probably Darwin and Marx have transformed the thought and action of multitudes in our day more radically than any writers or participants in the history of the nineteenth century. Though both have aroused violent opposition, whether we like it or not, more millions of men in the world today are following two members of the Jewish race than any men who ever lived—Jesus of Nazareth and Karl Marx. There must be some reason for this.

The following articles are an attempt to understand the meaning of Marx. As a simple introduction, and confessedly oversimplified, selections are incorporated from Sherwood Eddy's chapter on "A Unified Philosophy of Life" from his *RUSSIA TODAY: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM IT?* together with fresh material. He writes as a non-Marxist, giving his evaluation of Marx.

Sidney Hook, Professor of Philosophy in New York University, writes as a Marxist but also as a critic of the methods of the Communist Party both in Soviet Russia and in the United States.

*The Modern Monthly* has kindly given permission to republish here their interesting Symposium of April, 1934, upon "Why I am Not a Communist" by Bertrand Russell, John Dewey and Morris R. Cohen, with Sidney Hook's reply to them.

This is published both in book form and in pamphlet editions for the use of students and teachers. Naturally each writer is responsible only for his own views.

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# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF MARX

by SHERWOOD EDDY

## KARL MARX AND THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

KARL MARX (1818-1883) was born at Treves in Rhenish Prussia. His ancestors on both sides were Jewish rabbis, but he himself remained non-semitic in sympathy. In the University of Berlin Marx threw himself with tremendous intensity into the study of the classics in Latin and Greek, philosophy, law, history, literature and art. He later burned three volumes of his original poems which recorded the strenuous nature of his search for truth and his dawning social passion, as in his lines:

*"Ne'er can I perform in calmness  
What has seized my soul with might,  
But must strive and struggle onward  
In a ceaseless, restless fight."*

In his philosophical struggle he turned his back upon the abstract idealism of Kant and Fichte and was taken captive by his great master Hegel and his dialectic method. His association with Feuerbach turned him to materialistic realism, but he forever retained Hegel's method of interpreting life and history. He married the beautiful and gifted daughter of a Prussian official, Jenny von Westphalen, a descendant on her mother's side of the Earl of Argyle, and she became the faithful companion of his labors in poverty and hardship.

In his passionate search for truth he sacrificed the ambition of his father that he should become a successful lawyer, and the hope of a professor's chair in the University of Bonn. He turned temporarily to journalism and literary work in Germany and France. His association with Friedrich Engels, the son of a rich German manufacturer who owned a cotton mill near Manchester, led to a lifelong friendship and coöperation between these kindred spirits. Marx finally settled in London, where for thirty-four years he pursued his studies and writing in the British Museum.

Marx and Engels had founded a German workers' society and joined the League of the Just, which became later the Communist League. At its second congress in London in 1847 Marx and Engels were commissioned to draw up a statement of the basis of the organization. This appeared in 1848 as the *Communist Manifesto*, which gave a philosophy and a program of action to the gathering movement, as Rousseau's *Social Contract* had to the French Revolution.

For his first ten years in London as correspondent of the *New York Tribune*, Marx had at times to pawn his clothes and "was hardly over the verge of starvation." While Darwin was devoting twenty years to his

hypothesis of evolution, Marx worked for three decades, often sixteen hours a day, on his social system. What Darwin did for biology Marx did for sociology. Each was the leader of a movement which became a great historic watershed.

Marx became the leading spirit in the First International, organized in 1864. In 1867 appeared the first ponderous volume of his *Capital*. After the last decade of struggle against pain and disease, studying higher mathematics and the Russian language in his periods of recreation, he died peacefully in 1883.

The First International was organized as the International Working Men's Association. Its ten years of troubled existence were ended by the division between the socialists led by Marx, and the anarchists led by Bakunin, "the apostle of universal destruction." Fifteen years later, in 1889, the Second International was founded as a loose organization of the World's Labor and Socialist Parties. The World War destroyed the unity of all such international workers' organizations. In 1919 the Third International was organized uniting the Communist Parties of all nations under a controlling central organ in Moscow. This is the Comintern, or Communist International.

As to the title of the *Communist Manifesto*, Engels wrote in the preface: "Socialism was, in 1847, a middle-class movement, Communism a working-class movement. Socialism was, on the Continent at least, 'respectable'; Communism was the very opposite. And as our notion, from the very beginning, was that 'the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself,' there could be no doubt as to which of the two names we must take. Moreover, we have, ever since, been far from repudiating it. . . ."

#### A UNIFIED PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

Russia has achieved what has hitherto been known only at rare periods in history, the experience of almost a whole people living under a unified philosophy of life. All life is focused in a central purpose. It is directed to a single high end and energized by such powerful and glowing motivation that life seems to have supreme significance. It releases a flood of joyous and strenuous activity. The new philosophy has the advantage of seeming to be simple, clear, understandable, all-embracing and practical.

Some philosophies have existed as a dream in the mind of a man or of an esoteric group, or they have been discussed in academic grooves or recorded in the archives of classic libraries. But this philosophy is being incarnated in the life of a nation covering nearly one-sixth of the earth. Never was any other system so swiftly and completely embodied in the life of mankind. Man individually and socially needs a philosophy or a working faith. The life of the animal is one of blind instinct, it is set in fixed grooves and habits. But in so far as man is lifted above the brute and does not live a mere hand-to-mouth animal existence, he lives unconsciously by some belief, or way of life, however crude or superstitious, that is capable of rational statement. If we take philosophy at its simplest as the attempt to understand the meaning of experience, it is evident that man ought to try to comprehend the significance of his own life. As he advances in

experimentation and conscious reflection he may finally ask, with Royce, where he can find a cause, or way of life, that is rational, supreme, compelling, all-embracing and fit to centralize life. What are the real values in life and can they be harmonized and integrated in a single purpose, embodied in a unified personality and achieved in society?

There have been favored periods in the past, creative epochs, when men achieved such a unified philosophy of life. There were such periods in early Greece. Even in the wide diversity of various schools of thought many were united in some way of life that seemed supremely worth while. Again, in certain periods of German philosophy life was rationalized and meaningful. In some early religious movements, as in Buddhism and Christianity, when they were in the nascent state, when tides of new life and experience demanded expression and interpretation in thought, life was unified and made whole. In the Middle Ages, whatever their defects, men were united under a single philosophy.

The modern world has lost such a philosophy. The World War destroyed the faith of the nineteenth century. It was a rude awakening to stark and sordid realities. Life was shattered, disintegrated, dissipated. Faith had given place to cynicism, and hope to despair. Yet it was in just this period of shell shock, disillusion and pessimism after the war and in the post-war depression that a large section of mankind achieved again what had seemed forever impossible, a unified philosophy of life. It was a way worked out by Karl Marx, a student of Hegel, an heir of the classic philosophy of Greece and Germany, thinking and writing as an exile in the British Museum in London, and later applied by the son of a petty Russian nobleman, Lenin. No philosophy ever played a more violent or dynamic part in history, or so sharply divided our modern world. We will do well to try to understand it.

Before Marx there had been much scattered thought, strong emotion and sporadic action on behalf of various socialistic theories. But Marx gathered up all the vague revolt and desire of the oppressed toilers and gave them what appeared to be a clear philosophy, a program of action, and such a relationship to cosmic forces that it seemed the very stars in their courses were fighting for them for certain victory.

This philosophy seemed to explain their past and to give rational justification for their foreordained future. Every great revolution has had some philosophy behind it, but no other ever had such an effective weapon, like a shining sword of thought. It unites the ultimates of philosophy with practical economics, applied science, dynamic sociology and social psychology, coupled with an almost religious emotion and future prophecy that has the appearance not of faith but of scientific certainty. The hope of a glorious future nerves the faithful for immediate social action. For union with the infinite is substituted unity with the social whole. Preparation for a future life is replaced by sacrifice for a future generation. Their philosophy holds to a rational principle in the universe, an ethical progress in history, and a personal and social dynamic for almost impossible achievement in the transforming both of the material environment and of human nature.

There are possible spiritual implications for the future in this as yet



truncated philosophy which must and will be worked out in less strenuous times, but for the present the whole system is concrete and compelling. Labor is dignified and intellectualized by its vision of purpose and goal. Everything that they can envisage in life is to be shared by all. As its goal is in the future the system is not static but requires continual progress and endless achievement. Unified by a rational plan it need never degenerate in rotting luxury, or hopeless poverty, or individual hedonism. The ever-progressive good life must be achieved for all. They have a world to win. And their philosophy gives them such a living faith that their leaders in the past through decades of prison and poverty and exile were sure of ultimate triumph. Whatever its limitations or defects, such a philosophy is certainly effective.

As surely as Soviet Russia has become united, we of the West have witnessed a philosophic decadence and disintegration. Where feudalism once united the world, capitalism has divided it by the competitive anarchy of a loose individualism. Not organized society but the insecure individual is now the unit where every man is for himself. The economics of profit conflict with the aims of culture. The gain of the few is pitted against the welfare of the many. This whole *laissez-faire* philosophy of life breeds competitive strife between individuals, classes, races and nations. It is rife with inner contradictions and conflicts and actually results in a succession of crises, depressions and wars, which have now almost inevitably become world wars.

This decadence and division is witnessed in our institutions and in our literature on both sides of the Atlantic. Our most effective literature is frequently that of despair, cynicism or protest. Though almost none of the writers agree as to what they want, nearly all unite in condemning the present disintegrating order.

On the English side Aldous Huxley is characteristic of the present decadence in contrast to the moral fiber and evolutionary hope of his Victorian forbear, Thomas Huxley. His *Brave New World* is terrifying and devastating as it depicts his vision of our materialistic future. Human life is conveniently bred in the test tubes and beakers of laboratories, as in incubators, and it is scientifically conditioned and molded at will. Life is "nasty, brutish and short," lived in a moral cesspool that has long passed beyond all distinctions of good and evil. Men swear "by our Ford" or "in the year of our Ford." However amusing, or contemptuous, or cynical such writing may be, it offers no possible philosophy for creative achievement or high living for youth. It is decadent.

The spirit of the age is characteristically expressed in an American volume of *Living Philosophies* which contains the intimate credos of more than a score of writers on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>1</sup> In one of the opening essays John Dewey says: "The chief intellectual characteristic of the present age is its despair of any constructive philosophy—not just in its technical

<sup>1</sup> *Living Philosophies*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1931. A series of intimate credos by Albert Einstein, Sir James Jeans, Theodore Dreiser, James Truslow Adams, Sir Arthur Keith, Beatrice Webb, Fridtjof Nansen, R. A. Millikan, Hiliare Belloc, George Jean Nathan, Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, H. G. Wells, H. L. Mencken, Julia Peterkin, Irving Babbitt, Joseph Wood Krutch, Lewis Mumford, Hu Shih, J. B. S. Haldane, Irwin Edman and Dean Inge.

meaning, but in the sense of any integrated outlook and attitude. . . . The result is disillusionment." Theodore Dreiser writes: "I find life to be a complete illusion or mirage . . . in the wholly inexplicable world. . . . The best I can say is that I have not the faintest notion of what it is all about, unless it is for self-satisfaction. . . . I catch no meaning from all I have seen, and pass quite as I came, confused and dismayed." Irving Babbitt says: "Unless there is a reaffirmation of the truths of the inner life in some form—religious or humanistic—civilization is threatened at its base." James Truslow Adams writes: "We are now floundering in a morass. . . . The present situation cries aloud for some code. . . . We are bewildered."

George Jean Nathan takes a position that would be regarded with contempt in Russia when he says: "In hedonism I believe above all other beliefs. To me pleasure and my own personal happiness—only infrequently collaborating with that of others—are all I deem worth a hoot. . . . I have all I can do to look out for my own happiness and welfare." H. L. Mencken states his credo of cynicism and Bertrand Russell writes again as formerly on "the firm foundation of unyielding despair. . . . Brief and powerless is man's life; on him and all his race the slow sure doom falls pitiless and dark." It is, however, Joseph Wood Krutch in his credo and more fully in his *Modern Temper* who is typical of our decadent modern philosophy and of its results. He writes: "If one turns to the smarter of these novelists—Mr. Aldous Huxley, Mr. Ernest Hemingway—one will discover in their tragic farces the picture of a society which is at bottom in despair because . . . it has lost the sense of any ultimate importance inherent in the experience which preoccupies it. . . . To Huxley and Hemingway love is at times only a sort of obscene joke . . . debaucheries born of nothing except a sense of the emptiness of life . . . in this generally devaluated world." Mr. Krutch further says: "A color has faded from our palette, a whole range of effects has dropped out of our symphony. . . . We are carried one step nearer to that state in which existence is seen as a vast emptiness. . . . We have grown used to a Godless universe, but we are not yet accustomed to one which is loveless as well, and only when we have so become shall we realize what atheism really means."<sup>1</sup>

These typical credos of our age are unconscious expressions of a decaying economic order. Karl Marx, with all his inadequacies, shows why that order, filled as it is with inner contradiction and strife, is doomed, and why we are nearing the end of an epoch. Though never taking the time to formulate a comprehensive system of philosophy, he at least outlined a new theory and way of life which was destined to be the creative instrument of a new epoch. We are struck by the contrast of the impatience and gloom of the modern temper of the age and of our lost philosophy, as contrasted with the faith and hope and titanic creative energy of Soviet Russia. It is our belief that whatever we may conceive to be the defect of the Marxian system that would make it impossible of acceptance for most of us, we have need as individuals and as a society to understand and evaluate this system, and in so far as we find it inadequate, to endeavor to achieve again for ourselves a unified philosophy of life. If we are not satisfied with

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Modern Temper*, pp. 113, 303.

the philosophy of Marx, have we a better one of our own? In the meantime, without taking anything for granted, we must first try to state as simply and clearly as we can the most important elements of Marx's system.

### *The Philosophy of Karl Marx*

Marx's teaching resolves itself into three principal elements: a philosophy of history, an economic theory, a practical program for the realization of a new social order.

We may sum up these three principal positions as follows:

1. His philosophic method, *the dialectic process*, maintains that evolution in nature, history and the human mind is through the conflict and resolving of opposing forces. His philosophy of history, in its *materialist* or *economic interpretation*, holds that the principal influence which shapes human progress is the method of economic production in each period.

2. His labor theories of *value* and *surplus-value* endeavor to show that the workers who create value receive less than they produce, under a system where the owners of the means of production appropriate the surplus.

3. His theory of social development in that the *conflict of classes* is the driving force of history, which leads, through the inner contradiction of an economic system, to its ripening and decline, to the end of one epoch and the birth of the next.

His practical program is through the organization of labor unions, the waging of the class war and setting up at the appropriate time, upon the breakdown of the old order, under *the dictatorship of the proletariat*, the new socialist state, which is ultimately to bring in the final, classless society of communism. Each of these we shall briefly examine before proceeding to a criticism and evaluation of the system.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. *Dialectic Materialism and the Economic Interpretation of History*

Hegel had borrowed the term *dialectic* from the Greeks, who had employed the word as denoting the art of discussion by discourse and rejoinder, the search for truth by the bringing out of contradictions and antitheses in the open conflict of opposing views.<sup>2</sup>

According to Hegel, not only all matter and mind but the entire universe is in motion in the evolutionary process. The dialectic process, of progress realized through conflict, appears in nature, in history and in the human mind. In a logical statement of this process we have first a positive assertion of something; then the contradiction, the antagonistic element, or negation; and finally the negation of the negation, or the reconciliation of

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted throughout this chapter not only to the writings of Marx, which I shall quote, but to the interpretive works of Dr. A. D. Lindsay, the Master of Balliol, in his *Karl Marx's Capital*; Professor Sidney Hook's *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*; the writings of my friend Max Beer; Professor Harold Laski's *Communism* and his essay on *Karl Marx*; the Ryazanoff edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, and other works.

<sup>2</sup> As illustrated in the writings of Plato: "Dialectic is the process of thinking by which the dramatic conflict of ideas is resolved by definition, differentiation, and re-definition, until one ultimate, luminously self-evident insight is reached in which the original conflict of ideas is harmonized." Sidney Hook, *Towards the Understanding of Marx*, p. 77.

these two opposites in a higher unity. Thus there is a thesis, a challenging antithesis, and then the interpenetration of these opposites until they are resolved in a higher synthesis. Somewhat arbitrarily Hegel forces all the movement of nature, of history and of the human mind into the mold of his dialectic, or progress by conflict and the reconciliation of opposites.

No concrete illustration does full justice to the dialectic process which is not mechanical and repetitive. We might think of a pendulum swinging to the two extremes at two successive moments, carrying the hour hand of progress along the face of time, advanced equally by the backward as by the forward swing. We might suggest two poles of an electric current, the positive and the negative, as the constructive and destructive, the evolutionary and revolutionary process of progress, both necessary. We might think of an ascending spiral as we pass around a complete circle, never to return to the same point but to rise to a higher level, which becomes the starting point of a new ascent.

But we can better conceive of a discussion of two parties, each seeking, not to defeat the opponent, but with full recognition of the limited value in the partial thesis and antithesis, to discover a new position which will conserve the element of truth in each and combine them in a fresh creative synthesis. This will offer no dogmatic finality of absolute truth but the fresh starting point of further progress through the challenge and resolution of contending forces, in endless progress through conflict.

Hegel saw all nature and history as one majestic process of development propelled by the Idea, the Eternal Thinking Process, the Absolute or Divine mind, in creation, negation and recreation. Marx accepts his dialectic formula and method but in place of the abstract and mystical Idea he substitutes economic forces as the dynamic of change. In place of Hegel's idealism he substitutes his own materialism. Instead of making the material world the mere vestment of the reality of the Idea, he places the material world as the basic reality and man's ideas as "the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into terms of thought." He believed he had thus taken Hegel's dialectic and "turned it right side up." Thus inverted it becomes Marx's materialist conception of history or economic determinism.

Marx follows Hegel in trying to show that social change is produced by the interaction of nature, society and human intelligence. For illustration, the objective conditions, natural and social, provide the positive *thesis*; the human needs and purposes provoked by these conditions furnish the answering *antithesis*; these interpenetrating provoke a course of action as a *synthesis*, which leads to a social advance.<sup>1</sup>

Marx in his economic determinism, or the materialist interpretation of history, does not hold that man is only actuated by material motives. His studies had convinced him, however, that the *chief* factor in social change was not geographic environment, nor the ideas of an age, but economic conditions, especially the method of production of the time. If, for instance, in different periods you have slave labor, then the feudal windmill, and later the industrial steam mill or factory, these will not only affect the lives

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

of the owners and workers but also the institutions of the period and finally its ideas.<sup>1</sup> Thus the key to the development of society is economic struggle and the means of production of any period create their own type of economic structure and division of society into classes, as between masters and slaves, lords and serfs, owners and wage dependents. In his materialist conception of history, Marx was combining two schools of thought, the Hegelian conception of collective historical development and the classical English individualist economics; the one philosophical and the other economic. His system thus allows for the interaction of culture, including politics, and economics. But the predominant cause of the changes and developments under capitalism in the last century and a half were the methods of production introduced by the industrial revolution.<sup>2</sup>

For Hegel, all history is but the development of the idea of freedom. Marx also sought ultimate freedom when economic determinism should be overcome in the establishment of a classless society. Economic forces dominate society only until society takes the control of economic forces. In the meantime each class is governed by self-interest. While rare individuals may sacrifice their economic interests for the welfare of society, classes as such never do so. "In every epoch," says Marx, "the ruling ideas have been the ideas of the ruling class." These are today exercised through the control of the press, the cinema, the radio, the school, the church, industry and government. The owners of the means of production dominate each epoch, whether they be the workers in Soviet Russia or the capitalists in America. Marx was not trying to fix the chains of a system of economic determinism upon the workers, but rather the opposite. He offered them a method of understanding and of *making* history. Man could change his environment and himself, for he was meant for freedom.

In our experience we distinguish between things and ideas. Which of the two is primary? Hegel, as an idealist, held that thought is primary and action secondary, that ideas of things are more important than things themselves. Thought is the judge of life. Things and the material world are only the appearance of the idea. A true philosophy would then be the supreme need to apprehend the universe—which is an idea. This results in the tendency "to substitute ideas for things, to take refuge from reality in imagination, to live in make-believe."

Marx, as a realist, held that things are prior to ideas, action is more important than thought, and practice more important than theory. The brutal economic facts of life determine its thoughts. Man must seek freedom for his spirit by the control of economic necessity, especially of the

<sup>1</sup> Marx says: "The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life." *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Marx did not teach a rigid mechanistic determinism but opposed it. Engels, after his death, says: "Marx and I are partly responsible for the fact that the younger men have sometimes laid more stress on the economic side than it deserves. In meeting the attack of our opponents it was necessary for us to emphasize the dominant principle, denied by them, and we did not always have the time, place or opportunity to let the other factors concerned in the mutual action and reaction get their deserts."

means of production for his material life. There must be no escape in a dream world, even of great thoughts like those of Plato and Hegel. *Theory and practice are one.* All theory must then seek to validate itself in action. No belief can be demonstrated by abstract argument. Knowledge is no longer an end in itself. A true philosophy is only an instrument for creating the good life for all. This is what it means to be a true realist. We must change the brutal external facts of life, remake man's environment and then man's own nature. This is the dialectic march of progress through the interpenetration of opposites.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Value and Surplus-Value

Marx was a great sociologist rather than a modern scientific economist. He may be ranked as the first great economic historian, or as the last of the school of classical economists. These included Adam Smith (1723-1790), Ricardo (1772-1823) and Marx (1818-1883). These early economists sought to find a theory of value to account for the variation in prices. The first two found value to be the result of "natural law" and therefore presumably just. Marx accepted Ricardo's theory that labor was the basis of all commercial values but dropped his idea of natural law and revolutionized his classical economics.

Political economy arose as the apologetic of a social order and it is often so to this day. Ricardo was the apologist for the bourgeois and Marx for labor. The early classical economists believed that as the economic order was ruled by natural law it was in stable equilibrium. Marx showed that the system was full of inner contradictions, in unstable equilibrium. He challenged the liberals' claim that liberty, equality and fraternity were provided by the system and showed that these were not realized by the helpless workers. The system meant freedom for the capitalist and exploitation for labor.

Marx in his labor theory of value sought a universal principle of social valuation, or "real cost," to which varying price relations could be referred. He made the unit and cause of value an hour of socially necessary labor, of a given degree of intensity and skill, applied according to the normal technique of an industry. Commodities should exchange in proportion to the socially necessary labor hours required for their production.

The owner of the means of production bought the labor power of the worker. This was a mere commodity that had to be quickly sold at whatever was offered if the worker was not to starve. Under "freedom of contract" and *laissez-faire* individualist economics the worker thus became primarily a commodity rather than a member of society entitled like the employer to a just reward. Wages were as low as possible and gravitated to the cost of maintaining the laborer. Labor produced more than it was paid and the balance was taken by the owner for his profit. In a given number of hours labor created enough value to earn its wage. The balance of its time went to the creation of "surplus-value" which formed the reservoir from which profit, interest and rent were drawn by the owners of the means of production.

<sup>1</sup> Professor John Macmurray of University College, London, makes the clearest statement of this position in his *Philosophy of Communism*.

Profit was the exploitation of the value of labor and its product. It was not the result of a natural law but the special privilege of a private system of ownership. Value, profit, wealth were social products but they were not socially shared. They were chiefly appropriated by the few fortunate owners of the land, raw materials and machines. The fault was not that of the individual employer but of the system; just as the "good" slave owner was not to blame for the evils of slavery, but the system itself. Marx does not look upon slavery, feudalism and capitalism primarily as moral wrongs but as necessary historical epochs. The mission of capitalism was to open up and multiply the forces of production, to create abundant material wealth for all. Its function was production, not distribution. Adequate distribution was impossible where a few owned all the means of living, for each class always seeks first its own interests. The owners would make the profit but would never distribute it. This was human nature. One cannot ask men arbitrarily to change their nature; rather it is the outworn system of private monopolistic ownership which must be changed. To expect to change human nature, without changing the environment, would be like asking water to run uphill. It would be as fruitless as to ask slave owners to be more generous to their slaves. Even if they were it would not touch the real problem, which was of ownership. As long as one man is left in the keeping of another, at the mercy of another, injustice is certain.

An undue proportion of surplus-value was bound to go to the monopolist owners. This wealth the few could not possibly consume nor spend upon themselves. They were forced to invest it as capital for the production of more wealth, in ever-growing production and overproduction. Labor would always receive too little in wages to purchase this increasing overproduction. This would inevitably create a series of crises of depression and unemployment of ever-growing intensity until finally the system would break down because of its inherent contradictions. Thus, as truly as slavery and feudalism before it, and for the same reason, capitalism was doomed.

Upon this system the ever-multiplying forces of production and the progressive limitations upon consumption lead to anti-social consequences. When many are hungry and cold, commodities are deliberately destroyed to raise prices. There is a growing concentration of wealth and power for the few and growing discontent for the many. It is idle to tell the unemployed and the exploited wrecks of the system that skilled workers have privileges and luxuries which princes did not enjoy in former times. There is not increasing misery and an absolute decline in the workers' standard of living. Relatively, however, labor never receives an adequate share of the value in the creation of which it is the chief factor.

Marx says: "Profit and not use is the leading motive of capitalist production. Capitalism is shaken to its very foundation if we make use and enjoyment and not profiteering the leading motive of production."<sup>1</sup>

For a time the system is maintained by the extension of capitalism to imperialism. The raw materials and labor power of the backward or helpless people are exploited in the colonies and conquered areas of the capitalist nation. But this only multiplies the contradictions and injustices of the system. Greater crises, *world* depressions and *world* war are the inevitable

<sup>1</sup> *Capital*, II, p. 136.

results of this class system of strife when projected upon an imperialist scale.

Based upon the exploitation of labor, which is despoiled of the surplus-value which it creates, Marx tries to show that there is a necessary and irreconcilable antagonism between master and man, owner and wage worker, when he says: "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agonized toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation; at the opposite pole, that is, the class which produces its own product in the form of capital."

After centuries of the teaching of benevolent idealism, of more generous charity, or of the optimistic hope of evolutionary liberalism that the conditions of labor will be improved and that the employers in due time will give the workers all that they deserve, the followers of Marx are still able to point to the brutal facts of wealth unshared side by side with poverty unrelieved, because of the divorce of the masses from the ownership of the instruments of production. They are able to show that their economic helplessness results inevitably in the denial of equality in personal freedom, in justice, in education, in health, in privilege of all kinds and in political power. As truly as when Marx made the indictment in 1848 natural resources are still being wantonly wasted and human beings exploited. It is still true, and more glaringly apparent than when he wrote, that crises of growing intensity occur with world depressions, and that the economic system culminates in periodic wars that have now become world wars. All this is confirmed in many volumes of modern literature, as in the *Decay of Capitalist Civilization*, by Sidney Webb, now Lord Passfield.

Marx in his *Capital* thus describes the ripening and fall of capitalism: "As soon as this process of transformation has sufficiently decomposed the old society from top to bottom, as soon as the laborers are turned into proletarians . . . then the further socialization . . . takes a new form. That which is now to be expropriated is no longer the laborer working for himself, but the capitalist exploiting many laborers. This expropriation is accomplished by the action of the immanent laws of capitalist production itself, by the centralization of capital. One capitalist always kills many. Along with the constant diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolize all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with and under it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labor at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated."<sup>1</sup>

Marx's theory was one of natural right; it was the application to economics of the principle of human equality. He did discover that value was a social product; that labor was not a mere commodity; that it was being

<sup>1</sup> *Capital*, I, pp. 836, 837.



exploited and that such an unjust system could not and need not continue. He shows that a few own the bulk of the earth, its raw materials, factories, banks, instruments of production, and means of living, and grow rich by a system which compels the majority to work for them for a bare living wage. Is the system just? Must it continue? No! Marx shows the masses a way out. It is a way, he tells them, grounded in science and in natural law. It is bound to win, for the very stars in their courses are fighting for them. By some mystic and incomprehensible "dialectic process," by a supposedly scientific theory of value and of surplus value it is all being worked out for them. They do not need to understand it. They must believe that they are being exploited and join in the crusade for their own emancipation.

They accordingly believe that they see in Russia the first fulfillment of Marx's prophecy. They see for themselves economic crises and world depressions of growing intensity. They hear of wars and rumors of wars for capitalist imperialism. Finally they hear the prophetic promise of deliverance and of a new social order. What competing offer can the *status quo* of capitalism make? Is it any wonder that in spite of its ponderous economic theory, despite its glaring defects and inconsistencies, the burning heart of the message of Marx has gone straight to the heart of labor in many lands?

### 3. *Class Conflict and a Program of Action*

Marx sees the world growingly divided by private property into conflicting classes of possessors and dispossessed, and the driving force of history as the struggle between these two classes. He does not desire or create these classes but finds them already in existence. He and Engels describe many primitive communal societies with the common ownership of land in Russia, among the Teutonic tribes and "everywhere from India to Ireland." But with the rise of private property society becomes divided between master and slave, then lord and serf, and later industrial capitalist and wage worker. Marx holds that their interests are sharply antagonistic and irreconcilable. The employers will buy labor-power as cheaply as they can, labor will sell for as high a wage as possible; but the wage worker is in a poor position to bargain, as he must work or starve. This gives an enormous advantage to the owner of the means of production for the control of almost all of life.<sup>1</sup>

Society is made up of persons in relation; human relationships are what matter. Society is divided into two classes, those who will not starve if they don't work and those who will starve if they don't work. It is always in process of change and this change makes history. All men must first seek bread, to provide for their economic needs. The means of production are steadily improving by technical skill. This change in production changes the relations of men.

The two classes of owners and dependents struggle for the control of the means of production, or for their economic security. This control over nature and machines gives control over the lives of men. This struggle to control the means of production, this change and process, is the driving

<sup>1</sup> "The modern State authority is nothing more than a committee for the administration of the consolidated affairs of the bourgeois class as a whole," *Manifesto*, p. 28.

force of history. The sociological principle, or dialectic, of progress through conflict is the cause of change. Such is Marx's philosophy.

Marx makes the sweeping assertion in the opening of the *Manifesto* that: "The history of all human society, past and present, has been the history of class struggles. . . . More and more society is splitting into two great hostile camps, into two great and directly contraposed classes: bourgeois and proletariat."<sup>1</sup>

While there have been endless disputes as to the meaning of Marx's abstruse philosophy and "dialectic," the heart of his whole system was the class struggle leading to revolution. Man's business was to make history, which he defines as "the activity of man in pursuit of his ends." Marx says: "Hitherto, philosophers have but variously interpreted the world; it is not their business to *change* it." He also says: "By acting on the external world and changing it, man changes his own nature." As Professor Hook points out, Marx's philosophy is one of social *action*; it is a theory of social revolution. He furnishes "the fighting philosophy of the great mass movement." His method is the clue to his abstruse and seemingly contradictory doctrines. All his works were programs of action. As Engels said at his funeral in Highgate Cemetery: "Before all else Marx was a revolutionist."<sup>2</sup>

In the view of Marx, derived from Hegel's philosophy of the conflict of opposites, the class struggle is the vital factor in producing social change. It is the locomotive of progress. For instance, feudal society in its trade and commerce produced a commercial class, which, as an outcast "third estate," became antagonistic to the ruling class of feudal landowners, and in struggling for its rights led to the destruction of feudalism and the building up of a more advanced capitalist society. Capitalism was a mighty achievement and was itself the result of class struggle. In the same way the now outcast proletariat,<sup>3</sup> or fourth estate, is driven to struggle for its rights as each of the now privileged classes has in turn done before it.

Marx was a fighter, and such a man can best be understood by the things he fights against. For four and a half decades he fought against an unjust economic order and its defenders of privilege, against the philosophical idealists who were not realistic, against mechanistic materialists and fatalists who did not leave room for man's freedom under mechanistic

<sup>1</sup> The *Manifesto* continues: "Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, baron and serf, guild-burgess and journeyman—in a word, oppressor and oppressed—stood in sharp opposition to each other. They carried on perpetual warfare, sometimes masked, sometimes open and acknowledged; a warfare that invariably ended, either in a revolutionary change in the whole structure of society, or else in the common ruin of the contending classes."

<sup>2</sup> "What, then, must we ask, is distinctive of Marx's thought, if it is neither his problems, his purposes, nor his conclusions? The answer suggested here is that what is characteristic of Marx's thought is the *dialectical method* by which he undertook to solve these problems and attain his purposes." As Lenin wrote: "Our theory is not a dogma but a manual of action said Marx and Engels." Sidney Hook, *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, pp. 9, 70, 71.

<sup>3</sup> In ancient Rome the *proletarius* was the poorest class of the population, whose sole wealth consisted in its offspring, *proles*. Marx uses the word as denoting one whose only means of living is the sale of his labor power. The class war in Rome was carried on not by the slaves but between the free rich and the free poor. "The Roman proletariat lived at the expense of society, whereas modern society lives at the expense of the proletariat."

determinism, against romantic and utopian socialists and religionists who would not effectively organize to bring in a new epoch, and against selfish individualists and atomists who did not see the necessity of a class movement.<sup>1</sup>

Competition is the war of all against all, where even the workers compete with one another. The class struggle in the thought of Marx was a war to end war. In the Marxian dialectic, or conflict of opposing forces, the capitalist class furnishes the positive or conservative thesis, the proletariat is the negative or destructive antithesis, which must finally triumph by abolishing itself and its opposite of private property. This leads to the final synthesis "a synthetic unity of itself and its contrary" in the establishing of a new social order where the means of production will be owned and operated in common. When the conflict becomes acute between the material development of production, with all the evils of the machine age, and the social form of the discontented and unemployed proletariat the time is ripe for the leap from evolution to revolution.

Marx held that the working of the same inexorable laws of dialectic conflict which had overthrown slavery and feudalism would, with scientific certainty, bring about the disintegration of capitalism and the rise of socialism. There were various causes for this, all of which he enumerates in the *Manifesto*. These causes of the disintegration of capitalism include:

1. *The Concentration of Wealth and Production*.—Ever larger trusts and corporations will combine with growing centralization in industry, commerce, transportation and banking. Agriculture, however, has not yet followed this course save in Soviet Russia.

2. *The Absorption of the Middle Class*.—The petty-bourgeois and small shopkeepers in Marx's view will be driven to the wall. A few will rise to the ranks of the capitalists and found trusts and chain stores. More will sink as wage workers, or into the proletariat. "The Industrial revolution acted as a cream separator dividing the middle class milk into the capitalist cream and the proletarian skim milk."<sup>2</sup> As Marx foretold, there has been

<sup>1</sup> Professor Hook thus enumerates the opposing positions which he attacked: "Against the idealism of Bruno Bauer and his Young Hegelian associates, Marx presents the arguments for materialism. Against the passive materialism of Feuerbach, Marx defends the principles of activity and reciprocity which were central to Hegel's dialectic. Against the fatalism of both absolute idealism and 'vulgar' mechanism, Marx proclaims that human beings make their own history. . . . To the *wahre Sozialisten* who sought to initiate a movement of social reform on the basis of absolute ethical principles like 'social love' or justice, Marx declares that every realistic social movement must be a class movement. To simon-pure trade unionists struggling for 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work' he insists that every class struggle is a political struggle. . . . Against the classical school of economics . . . he urges that economic categories are transitory. Against the historical school of economics he vindicates the necessity of analysing the structure of political economy independently of speculative fancies about its origin. As opposed to the anarchist ideal, of complete decentralization, he defends the principle of authority. To the Lasallean cult of the state, he counters with the idea of its ultimate disappearance. He was as critical of petty bourgeois opportunism of the right as he was contemptuous of the ultra-left sectarianism of Most and Bakunin. The critics who made so much of Marx's contradictory positions never made an attempt to find a point of view from which these alleged contradictions turned out to be applications of the same principles and purposes to different historical situations." *Op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> See the excellent statement of Professor Paul Douglas in the *World Tomorrow*, March 15, 1933, p. 257.

"the accumulation of wealth at one pole of society" and poverty at the other. . . . There has been, as he prophesied, a vast concentration of wealth and a growth of a proletariat. He could not have foreseen, however, the creation of a new white-collar middle class, nor the diffusion of ownership in modern corporations coupled with concentration of production and control.

3. *The Growth of Unemployment.*—As Marx prophesied, there has been a growth of a vast "reserve army" of the unemployed further to weaken the position of labor. Even prior to the world depression the percentage of unemployment in Europe was higher than before the war. During that depression the army of the unemployed rose to over thirty millions in Europe and America. Only Soviet Russia was able to eliminate unemployment upon the Marxian plan.

4. *The Increasing Misery of the Workers.*—Marx says: "In proportion as capital accumulates, the condition of the worker, *be his wages high or low*, necessarily grows worse." The pressure of unemployment forces down wages.<sup>1</sup> Marx holds that increasing misery would be the outcome of *unmodified* capitalism. But we have had *controlled* capitalism, modified by the social control of government, of legislation, of trade unions and of a plan. The condition of the workers has, of course, not grown absolutely worse, for real wages have risen since Marx wrote. But have they risen as rapidly as profits and interest, especially before the depression from 1922 to 1929?

5. *The Increasing Severity of Crisis.*—Marx believed that crises would occur because too much capital and surplus-value would be invested in over-production and too little would be paid as wages to furnish purchasing power. Surplus stocks would close plants, increase unemployment, and create depressions. The contradiction between the expanding power of capitalist production and labor's limited consumption would become more intense and growing crises would result.<sup>2</sup> Recurring wars would follow as a result of the present economic order and world imperialism. The World War and world depression seems to have borne witness to the fulfillment of this prediction.

6. *The Rise of a Militant Working Class.*—Marx believed that as the working class increased in numbers and as its condition became worse in recurring depressions, it would become more class conscious and unite for its own protection and the achievement of its destiny. Class conflict cannot be resolved without changing the whole structure of society. The state as the agency of the interests of the dominant class will always cultivate the propaganda that the state is above all classes and that all are one, with identical or harmonious interests. Every legal code and educational system will declare this. Strikes will be broken by the force of the government

<sup>1</sup> *Capital*, I, p. 714.

<sup>2</sup> Engels says: "Crises such as these have been wont to occur every five years." And again: "During the whole century . . . at intervals of from five to seven years a similar crisis has occurred, bringing in its train intolerable wretchedness of the workers." While writing *Capital*, Marx thought such cycles between prosperity and slump embraced periods covering ten or eleven years. The League of Nations economic experts estimate that in recent decades they have occurred on an average of every four and a quarter years. *Manifesto*, Ryazanoff edition, p. 98.

which always stands in defense of the *status quo*. But in the end the workers will learn that only through class struggle can they attain their rights. And they will achieve them. Such were the teachings and predictions of Marx regarding the class struggle.

Though Marx does not so minutely subdivide them, under the dialectic of conflict, history is to pass through the following epochs: 1. Primitive Communism; 2. Slavery, the antique economy; 3. Feudal Serfdom; 4. the Capitalist Wage System; 5. Transitional State Capitalism; 6. State Socialism; 7. Pure Communism. Marx is chiefly concerned with Slavery, Feudalism, Capitalism and Socialism.

Whatever mistakes we may find in the positions of Marx, they certainly served to remove the inferiority complex of masses of workers. Some of his prophecies have been fulfilled in the disintegration of the capitalist system. There is no contradiction to this trend in the experience of fascist countries under dictatorship, if fascism be understood as the last phase of decaying capitalism, or the last struggle of the middle class in the effort to save itself. Soviet Russia seems to furnish an example of the working of the Marxian system even in the first and hardest decade and a half of its existence. There we witness the progressive elimination of national, racial, cultural and even class distinctions in so far as property is concerned, in what seems to be a growingly classless society.

The words "class war" and "revolution" have an ugly sound to patriots in any "land of the free." They do not object to a war of independence to establish their country, a civil war to preserve it, a World War to make it safe for democracy. These are the fruits of patriotism. But any revolt of the workers is counted sheer sedition. Such are the traditions of a class, conditioned to glorify war and abhor revolution. There is nothing more sacred about a nation than the wider humanity of which it is but a part, nor more sacrosanct in a territorial than in a functional community. The propertied class and their white-collar dependents will stand loyal to the nation which gives title to their possessions, while many of the dispossessed will believe that their loyalty is due to their class and to the workers of the world. So long as there are classes of possessors and dispossessed, or what Disraeli called "two nations," the rich and the poor, so long will there be discontent and class conflict. *Class strife is, indeed, a present fact and no honest realism can ignore it.* There is no possible ultimate solution save to abolish these classes by providing equal justice for all, either by evolution or by revolution. History reiterates that if the possessing class will not give it, the dispossessed will take it; just as the capitalist class themselves wrested power from their feudal superiors. There was nothing more sacred in their former struggle than in that of the workers today.

Revolutions are almost inevitably destructive. They occur only when evolutionary progress to justice is blocked by the class in possession and power, when the hard crust of the *status quo* restrains the molten lava of discontent until the volcano of revolution bursts into eruption. Nearly always the possessing class is blinded by its own self-interest and class ethics of property "rights," so that it cannot see in time the injustice of the system which seems hallowed by custom and tradition. This class fondly believes

that trouble is due to agitators, that if people would only be quiet and not "rock the boat," the present unjust system could be indefinitely perpetuated. They do not see that class conflict is already here and must be faced, and that they themselves, rather than agitators, have inevitably created it.

### *The Revolution*

In classical theory the state had existed to secure the interests of society as a whole. In prevailing practice, however, under the class divisions created by private property, not the well-being of the masses but the privileged classes became the chief concern of the governing class. Criminal law was often more severe upon offenses against property than against the person. The amended American Constitution guarantees the Negro freedom and the franchise, and the worker equal rights with the capitalist. But in certain areas the Negro dare not vote and the force of the state in its troops and police is habitually called out to defend the property of the employer rather than the rights of striking workers.

The state is necessarily the embodiment of force and force habitually upholds the *status quo*. "The state is a special organized public power of coercion which exists to enforce the decisions of any group or class that controls the government." But force is also the method of revolution. Those in revolt believe they are driven to use it because it will be employed against them if they do not.

According to the Marxian formula, as the advance guard of the working class, a Communist Party must be organized with centralized power, under iron discipline, with a single mind and will. The sole purpose of this party must be to prepare for and direct the coming revolution which Marx sees as the only solution of the class struggle. No class has ever been known to surrender its special privileges and share them equally with the dispossessed, unless it was forced to do so. With the anticipated growing disintegration of capitalism, chronic unemployment, the failure of the mechanism of credit and the private banks, the breakdown of the machinery of production, distribution or exchange, there will be strategic crises. Organized labor is urged to lead the class-conscious struggle with strikes, riots and mass demonstrations. With the touchstone of the dialectic the party must know when the psychological moment comes to seize all the key positions, political and economic, and the state itself.<sup>1</sup>

Once the state has been seized the workers are bidden to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat under the direction of the vanguard of the Communist Party. The party then seeks to make the revolution permanent and continuing until all the members of the ruling and possessing classes are deprived of power. "Political force must derive its ethical sanction from some positive social function." Marx considered a dictatorship of

<sup>1</sup> It was Lenin who almost alone realized when the hour had struck for revolution in St. Petersburg. In the Smolny Institute, where he lived and directed the soviets of workers, peasants and soldiers, is exhibited the time-table of the crucial day when all the strategic centers of czarist control were seized. Lenin writes: "The fundamental law of revolution . . . is as follows. . . . Only when the masses do not want the old régime, and when the rulers are unable to govern as of old, then only can the revolution succeed. This truth may be expressed in other words: Revolution is impossible without an all-national crisis, affecting both the exploited and exploiters."

the proletariat as better than the present dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, for in a class society economic justice and social equality were impossible. It seemed to Marx that as the present order was established by force, is founded in force and will never yield its monopoly of privilege to any reformist evolutionary procedure, there was no other way than to meet organized force with force, as did the American Colonies in 1776. If living today, he would suggest that any half-hearted hesitation in any necessary use of force would result only in the establishing of a fascist tyranny as in Italy and Germany and as in the case of the French Commune in 1871. He would point out the moral and intellectual renaissance that followed the French Revolution and the creative energy released by the great upheaval in Russia. Indeed, the whole Russian Revolution is almost the complete embodiment of all his principles and programs in so far as they could be applied up to this stage. It was the belief of Marx, as it is of all communists today, that the costs of a short violent revolution are far less than the appalling death rate from chronic slums, poverty, unemployment, malnutrition and recurring wars. Therefore they believe that their ultimate purpose is not to destroy, but to save the life that our unjust order is already wantonly destroying.

It is interesting to note that Marx thought in 1872 that the United States and England might prove exceptions and that the workers in these countries might win justice without the necessity of a violent revolution. In his speech to the workingmen at Amsterdam he said: "Some day the workers must conquer political supremacy. . . . Of course, I must not be supposed to imply that the means to this end will be everywhere the same. . . . There are certain countries, such as the United States and England, in which the workers may hope to secure their ends by peaceful means."<sup>1</sup>

The dictatorship of the proletariat was regarded as a necessary evil during the transition from a capitalist to a communist society. It is not part of communism but quite inconsistent with it. The appearance of a communist society would abolish all dictatorship, but the indefinite continuation of the present dictatorship in Russia postpones even the distant approach of real communism.

The state, which was originally organized as an instrument of class dominance, is supposed in time to disappear under a classless society. After a temporary dictatorship, whose sole object was to build a socialist society as quickly as possible, they would then achieve their ideal of "production according to one's capacities, and distribution according to one's needs." Rigid state socialism is expected to end in communism. People will have learned right habits and the government will be a mere organ for the administration of production. The political state will then "wither away."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Amsterdam, 1872, in the *History of the First International*, quoted by Sidney Hook, *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, p. 291. It is only fair to say that Lenin believed that though it might be possible to avoid revolution in these lands at that time it is true no longer, and practically all communists would agree with him today.

<sup>2</sup> Marx says: "Then there will no longer be any political power, in the strict sense of the term, seeing that political power is the official expression of the conflicts within bourgeois society." Engels says: "In one domain after another, the intervention of a state authority in social relations becomes superfluous, and therefore spontaneously ceases to

*Marxian Parties and Conflicts*

The followers of Marx, during and after his lifetime, like those of every other great philosopher or religious leader, divided into various competing schools of thought and action, each of which claimed to be carrying out the real purpose of the master. Each was able to maintain its own position by quoting certain proof-texts and passages and emphasizing congenial doctrines. Of these there were four principal movements or schools of thought.

1. "Orthodox" Marxists, of whom Karl Kautsky of Germany was the leader, turned Marx's philosophy of social revolution and his program of immediate action into an evolutionary science of respectable social development, which began to compromise with reformist, and then nationalistic, and later even militaristic and imperialistic practices. As the German Social-Democratic Party grew powerful, with three million voters and a strong representation in the Reichstag, later gaining the backing of nearly ten million trade unionists, with property valued at ninety million marks, they ceased to be a compact revolutionary body and gradually became the party of opposition with prospects of winning control of the state by parliamentary methods. They increasingly emphasized gradual social reform on a successful benevolent organization and respectable political party.

Marxism now became an "objective science" of social development for the understanding of history rather than the making of it. There was a comfortable creed of "inevitability" of "processes at work in the order of things" which accepted the orthodoxy of correct belief in lieu of revolutionary action. In the end the Social-Democratic Party became the chief support, with the Catholic Center Party, of the Weimar Constitution and Republic. They accepted the plums of office but they were weakened by compromise and corruption. They entered the World War to the goose-step of Hohenzollern imperialism instead of holding to Marx's moral cause of the oppressed workers. Orthodoxy in social-democratic Germany, and later under the Soviet dictatorship, became the nemesis and paralyzing blight upon Marx's free revolutionary dialectic.

2. The German revisionists under Bernstein swung still farther to the right from Marx's philosophy of radical revolution. Bernstein, who was the pupil of Engels and the teacher of Kautsky, accepted certain ethical and political doctrines of Kant of a social order that ought to be. Revisionist socialism became a kind of religion and a moral code which must win its way by peaceful persuasion, not violence. It blunted the clear-cut class struggle to a movement for reform for a vague and general humanity. Bernstein dropped much of the Marxian phraseology, substituting "a democratic, socialistic party of reform." He criticized the accuracy of Marx's analyses which were not being fulfilled, as in the case of the non-disappearance of the middle class. By dulling the edge of their class consciousness the workers were prepared to enter the World War as national "patriots," thus betraying their international revolutionary class cause. Kautsky admitted that he and Bernstein were Siamese twins in party affairs. Revision-

occur. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and by the management of the processes of production. The state is not abolished, it withers away." Marx, *Misère de la Philosophie*, p. 243. Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, p. 103.



ism had reduced Marxism to a liberal philosophy of social reform in direct contradiction to the *Communist Manifesto*.

3. The syndicalist heresy developed in France as a critical reaction to Marx, accepting some of his doctrines but repudiating others. In France the influence of Blanqui, Proudhon and the anarchist, Bakunin, was powerful. The trade unions, suspicious of political parliamentarism and the ambitious careers of their former socialist leaders who had deserted them, lined up solely on the economic front and adopted the general strike as almost their sole weapon. This was an isolated, ineffectual instrument which could terrorize but not construct. Sorel, who later influenced Mussolini, attempted to revise Marxism, ignoring or repudiating its political program but retaining and emphasizing its revolutionary violence. Sorel had a strong anti-intellectualist, anti-cultural, iconoclastic element in his system which repudiated all pacifism and the evolutionary orthodoxy of Kautsky, rejected both state socialism on the right and anarchism on the left, but tried to build a loose government of revolutionary syndicalism without any political party and without the dialectic continuity of Marx's much more practical program of organization and action. Like the I. W. W. of America, with its slogan of "no party," the movement, naturally, went to pieces, as Marx's writings clearly foretold that it must.

It was Lenin in Russia and Rosa Luxemburg in Germany who challenged and repudiated the three foregoing diversions of Marx and recalled the movement to its original revolutionary purpose. They held that reform and compromise would never bring the socialist state nor would it come automatically by evolutionary progress. Lenin's aim was the realization and promotion of the whole dialectical social process culminating at the right moment in the seizure of the political power of the state. The goal was the conquest of power, the means was the class struggle, reforms were mere by-products, never ends in themselves, and at times even dangerous as seductive palliatives and opiates.

While Kautsky and "orthodox" Marxism led logically to the founding of the short-lived German Republic, Lenin and revolutionary communism led to the founding of the U.S.S.R. dictatorship. Lenin was the radical who recalled the followers of Marx from the bypaths of compromise with the German social-democratic movement and the Kerensky Russian Republic to the original goal and method of the class struggle.

Lenin advanced in the application of Marx's dialectic to the phase of world-wide imperialism which had developed from the simpler nationalistic capitalism of Marx's own day. Marx was the giant intellect and social philosopher, Lenin the greatest practical revolutionary who ever lived. It has been the part of Stalin to guide the Russian dictatorship as a shrewd politician through the series of five-year plans which seek to build socialism and prepare for future communism. On the whole, although without Trotsky's brilliance, he is the best man in Soviet Russia to guide the continuing revolution in the building of socialism. In spite of its forced and cruel haste, collectivization has given Stalin the third place in Soviet Russian history following Marx and Lenin. He is fearless, ruthless, shrewd, disinterested and genuinely concerned for his cause, as were Marx and Lenin before him.

*What Can We Learn from Karl Marx?*

In the preceding statement of the teachings of Marx, in the effort to clarify and simplify for the beginner, there has undoubtedly been an oversimplification of his system, which itself oversimplifies the complexities of life. In our effort to evaluate the system we must not be led astray either by a mere difference in vocabulary or by our own bias. We must recognize the initial prejudice with which most of us approach the system. Many of us belong, or hope to belong, to the economically privileged, or to the comfortable middle class dependent upon them. We know little and therefore care inadequately how the other half of humanity lives, which belong to the poor, the unemployed, the economically disinherited. We do not realize how largely our whole view of life is economically determined by our social environment and the views of the class to which we belong. We see the slow gains in social conditions, in political liberties, in the economic status of organized labor, and believe that everything will come right of itself if only men will be patient and reasonable. But we must remember that by the renunciation of a great sacrifice Marx had placed himself among that other half of humanity and that he speaks for them. Whether they know anything about his abstruse philosophy or not, his general position increasingly represents the attitude of the dispossessed masses of the world.

Broadly, the economic order is following the path which Marx predicted. And there is always Soviet Russia standing as the spokesman and warning to represent his point of view and challenge the rest of the world. After five thousand years, the heirs of those who built the pyramids beneath the whip, the helots of Greece, the slaves of Rome, the serfs of the Middle Ages and the victims of the industrial revolution have been made class conscious and thought that they also are destined for emancipation and even sovereignty. They are proving that they themselves can rule in one considerable section of the world. But it must be remembered that five thousand years of the history of privileged classes has never given them their heritage. And after nineteen centuries the religion which claims to be the most social in its teachings has not even demanded, much less achieved, social justice for them.

Not many philosophers recognize the subjective coloring of their ideas as does Bertrand Russell when he says: "My outlook on the world is, like other people's, the product partly of circumstance and partly of temperament." Hegel was able to deduce, from his seemingly objective process of thought, the German people, Protestantism and the Prussian state as the highest manifestations of the Idea in history. Thus the state is to him "the march of God on earth." Marx likewise, unconscious of wishful thinking, was able to find a system that contained all his desires and a universe that was coöperating with him. He imagined that he had discovered by strictly scientific processes the laws which made the ultimate victory of the proletariat practically demonstrable. There was in his system a holdover of animism, or theology, or quasi-religious faith which he did not recognize. Nevertheless it gave an unconquerable faith to the workers like that of the warriors of Mohammed, which promised them victory or paradise. Engels, under the spell of Hegel's spiritual idealism, at the age of twenty-two had

written: "That everlasting struggle and movement of peoples and heroes, above which in the eternal world soars the Idea, only to swoop down into the thick of the fight and become the actual, self-conscious soul—there you have the source of every salvation and redemption, there the Kingdom in which every one of us ought to struggle." He and Marx later repudiated the vocabulary of this philosophy and theology; but, however illogically, as a religious faith in the ultimate triumph of their cause of proletarian justice it remained with them. Theirs was a materialism touched with idealism and fired by it. Their prophetic vision was a secularized version of the oft-repeated apocalyptic vision of a redeemed society for the disinherited classes. It was not wholly a scientific demonstration but partly an unrecognized religious hope. It was drawn from Hegel, and much of Hegel's thought was derived unconsciously from religion. As a result there is a great deal of religion and idealism in Russia today not recognized under a complete change of vocabulary and of ideas.

A complete, a final, a perfect system of philosophy has never been the achievement of mortal man. Yet there have been truths and values as well as serious limitations in all the really great systems. If we take the philosophy of Plato, of Aristotle, of Kant, of Hegel or of Marx, each is like the bed of Procrustes. We have to amputate the extremities of the complex facts of the body of human experience to make it fit into any one of these systems, certainly into that of Marx.

Let us begin with Marx's dialectic process and his economic interpretation of history. To Hegel the dialectic meant the process through which reason, by the reconciliation of opposites, advances in self-development to the perfection of absolute Spirit. To Marx the dialectic furnished chiefly the interpretation of the conflict of opposing classes in the social order which led to their emancipation.<sup>1</sup> To both it meant progress through conflict. To Hegel it was primarily a philosophic concept, to Marx a social dynamic. To Hegel, as to Plato, it meant the sublime contemplation of an other-worldly, spiritual Idea. Marx, with his feet on the earth, was passionately concerned with the material conditions which could emancipate the toiling helots of history. Hegel was lost in metaphysical communion with the Absolute. Marx was consumed in the liberation of humanity. Hegel attempted to write a *philosophy* of history. Marx essayed to change it. It would have been much simpler and more in harmony with his own materialism, as opposed to Hegel's abstract idealism, if Marx and his followers could have taken a simple functional view of intelligence, regarding thought as primarily purposive, as an instrument of action, instead of being bound by a cumbersome dialectic in thought.

There was some real value but also a heavy incubus in Marx's Hegelian presuppositions and abstract vocabulary which few of his followers really understood. They could never prove that this dialectic conflict of opposites was a law of nature or of thought. They could never demonstrate that the planets in their courses were formed or sustained by this law, nor that their own process of thought was by a conflict of opposites. Apart from the class conflict they could neither prove this dialectic nor anything by it.

<sup>1</sup> Engels defines the dialectic as "nothing more than the science of the universal laws of motion and evolution in nature, human society, and thought."

But it was another matter when they turned from this mysterious and abstract logic to purposive thought and action in the reconstruction of the social and economic order. Here it seemed to explain, to create, to justify and to fulfill the class struggle for liberation. Their cumbersome metaphysic and psychology did not greatly interfere with their flexible, revolutionary social realism. They were primarily not metaphysical philosophers but prophets of action. And here their system seemed actually to work. It apparently succeeded like success. It *seemed* to give them a mysterious philosopher's stone which unlocked the secrets of nature, the meaning of history and the hidden depths of human thought. It combined the attraction of the mystic and the magic with the hard realism of seemingly demonstrable science. It appeared to provide, ready made, a science, a philosophy and almost a religion to the disinherited class.

Even a modern Friend need find nothing necessarily incompatible with his own view in the dialectic interpretation of history. The conception of opposites clashing, interpenetrating and mutually fructifying one another has had a long and valued history. Heraclitus had proposed this principle of interpenetration some five hundred years B.C. Plato, a century later in his *Phædo*, had given it careful analysis and criticism. Professor Hocking has emphasized the "principle of alternation" in our own day, as have countless others.

Neither need our Friend be unduly alarmed at the harsh sound of "dialectic materialism" if he remembers Marx's fight for freedom against the mechanism, determinism and fatalism of much of the self-sufficient science of his day.<sup>1</sup> Certain aspects of the economic interpretation of history may be as readily assimilated today as was the similar thought of Aristotle by the early church and during the Renaissance. If we remember that Marx and Engels did not deny that there were other contributory elements, we ourselves cannot fail to admit that a major factor, and many of us would say that the *principal* determinant of social change, is the economic environment, especially the changes in the modes of production of a given age. We cannot deny that the largely monopolistic ownership of the means of production by the property owning class, on the one hand, and the economic dependence of the vast army of wage workers and the unemployed, on the other, not only affect but mold and determine the institutions, the laws, the economic and political organization of society, the ideas of men and the history of our time.

We would not oppose but supplement this economic view by an emphasis upon the element of the *moral* determination of history. It is when the economic forces represent moral realities that they become overwhelming. The economic plight of the workers makes an ethical demand upon the conscience. As Professor Flint says: "The welfare of society is dependent upon a practical recognition of moral principles—the laws of morality are conditions of the progress, and even of the existence of society." A world which starves in the midst of plenty, which enriches a few and pauperizes many in spite of overproduction, which divides and destroys mankind by greed and strife and war, needs the challenge both of realistic economics

<sup>1</sup> Professor Hook says: "Materialism in this regard means, then, nothing but a denial of *original* creation."

and of idealistic morals. To Marx and the prophets the two are one. If we have been deaf to the message of "Moses and the prophets" it is not strange that we resent the denunciation of Marx. But if we do, the very stones of hard reality cry out against us.

We must, however, supplement the much-needed Marxian social and collective emphasis with a higher view of the sacredness of the person and the rights of the individual. We should make room for the creative principle in history of the individual person. This we have learned from other sources. Extreme individualism, however, had overreached itself and needed the corrective of some such social emphasis as that of Marx.

The demand of Marx for justice had been made by the prophets for centuries. Because it was still unheeded, he had to thunder forth the message anew. He did more, however, than repeat a verbal demand. He almost "turned the world upside down." According to the record of the ancient prophets their message went often unheeded by a stiff-necked people. Plato's idealistic dream hardly touched the earth, though it fructified in later thought. Sir Thomas More's Utopia was never established nor taken very seriously. But Marx had thrown the whole world upon the defensive. He embodied his philosophy in organization during his lifetime and within a generation it was incorporated in nearly one-sixth of the planet. It is now disturbing the other five-sixths, whether we approve of his methods or not. Can it be denied that from the time of Socrates and Plato, and of Amos and Isaiah, no man ever made such an *effective* demand for economic change or so compelled the world to take him seriously? Though not more terrible than Amos, it is in the tones of the prophet that he closes the *Manifesto* as he thunders: "Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite!"

A genuine pacifist as a "maker of peace" may consistently challenge Marx's program of violence. But the patrioteer or the religionist who is ready to rush into war and to compel all others to do so, whatever their convictions, cannot fairly object to Marx's similar use of force. The last World War left, of combatants and non-combatants, 26,000,000 dead. The Marxist October Revolution did not sacrifice 2,600 in the actual fighting of a revolution which was almost bloodless, until during the counter-revolution there was an attempt to kill Lenin and to restore the czarist order. Wherein was a war holy which slew in its Moloch sacrifice twenty-six millions, and a revolution for social justice and a new social order of a classless society abhorrent which sacrificed less than twenty-six hundred lives? It is not the Quaker or the pacifist who most holds up his hands in horror at the Marxian class struggle and revolution, but the war makers and followers of capitalism, nationalism, imperialism and militarism.

Many believe that in the dialectic process communism, in its present form of a dictatorship of a materialistic economic state as a challenging thesis, provokes its antithesis of fascism, also under the form of the dictatorship of an economic state. Certainly both Mussolini and Hitler have tried to justify the tyranny of their dictatorships as a deliverance from what they declare to be the boundless evil of communism. If communism and fascism be considered as two opposing terms in the dialectic process of history,

neither dictatorship could be considered as the final stage, but both would require a higher synthesis, presumably of some form of socialism, which would reconcile this conflict of opposites. This synthesis would have to include liberty and justice, the welfare of the one and of the many, the initiative of a healthy individualism with the social control of collectivism. It would have to eliminate the evils of the tyranny of both the soviet and the fascist dictatorships.

### *An Evaluation of Marx*

Speaking for myself, I find Marx a stimulus and a challenge. He is dynamic, like a powerful reagent in the chemical laboratory. He affects me like the charge of dynamite in the blasting of an oil well. When in boring the oil-bearing strata are reached and the oil begins to ooze up, to "shoot" the well a charge of dynamite is often used to blast away all obstructions and release the full flow of oil. The dynamite does not create a single drop of oil, it merely releases its potential flow. Marx breaks up for me the encrusted strata of custom, tradition and prejudice in my own life and in our economic order with all its oppressive interests and classes.

Marx helps me in several ways:

1. He shows me the absolute necessity of social justice as an immediate, imperative, basic demand without which there can be no satisfying economic, social or spiritual order possible for man. He challenges the monstrosity of our whole unjust, competitive system, with its inevitable tension and strife, which ever threatens to break into class war at home and world war abroad.

I do not for a moment believe that labor-power is the sole source or measure of value. But when I have stripped Marx's doctrine of surplus-value of all out-of-date inadequacies of statement, there is an imperative, residual moral demand which the core of his doctrine makes upon me. The majority of the human race is still in the condition of primary poverty, despite man's multiplied productive power, which has reached the state of "overproduction" so far as the sole criterion of profit and purchasing power is concerned. Capitalism stands revealed as based upon the exploitation of labor, employed and unemployed, just as were the systems of slavery and feudalism which preceded it.

2. Marx helps me to be a realist in my theory of knowledge, though I am an idealist in my theory of reality. He delivers me from a sentimental idealism which has habitually failed to come to grips with reality and which deludes itself by a mere personal acceptance or proclamation of a utopian ideal, although the realization is ever postponed generation after generation and century after century. Until disturbed by Marx I had failed to call for a relentless reckoning to see whether we are in the course of the progressive realization of the ideal or whether we are accepting some excuse or alibi, almost as an opiate, justifying ourselves by the timid plea for the diluted ideal without even the bald demand for its fulfillment as a *sine qua non*.

I can accept the realism called for by Marx, that thought and action, theory and practice must be one. Theory cannot be verified in the arm-chair of the philosopher; it can be validated only in human history.

3. Marx has opened my eyes to recognize the dominant importance of the economic factor as a determinant of the social forces, the ideas and institutions of an age. The rôle of ideas is usually secondary to economic realities. While there is a diffusion of ownership in Western capitalism there is a growing concentration of the control of capital and the creation of classes of owners and dependents. Men think and act chiefly according to the self-interest of their class. Business men, for instance, have a prevailing similarity of outlook. The few exceptions only prove the rule. I have known few ruthless men who seemed thoroughly bad; and I have known at least one model employer, but he was quite impotent to change the system by his individual generosity. The vast majority of business men act according to their economic interests. While there is a wide divergence in their *profession* of ideals, I find little appreciable difference in *action* between those who profess religion and those who do not. Religion furnishes many of the ideas and ideals of those who profess it, but their economic interests dominate and determine action. Marx shows that we shall never change the system in time by seeking benevolent, model employers, any more than the system of slavery was changed by benevolent owners. Most of the slave owners were "good" men and kind to their slaves, just as most employers are good, but neither class ever radically changes the system. It is the economic system that is wrong. This affects our whole life today and, all unconsciously for most, poisons every human relationship.

4. I am helped in the interpretation of history and in reading the signs of the times by the dialectic process. Formal logic excluded the contradictory, while Hegelian logic reveals the universe fulfilling itself by a process of perpetual contradiction and conflict. Since the powers of production embody the result of the action of mind upon matter and of man's control over nature, Marx's conception of history, as G. D. H. Cole has shown, could better have been called realist rather than materialist. He wished, however, sharply to distinguish it from Hegel's type of idealism. Marx's theory of unceasing progress toward a classless society should forever exclude dogmatism, though this principle of free progress is now being contradicted and betrayed by the harsh, rigid fundamentalism of Moscow that would establish a Spanish inquisition against any progress that is not subservient to the "party line" of the clique in power. We must thus distinguish between Marx and Moscow.

I confess that the dialectic process seasons me to a hardened optimism. Because of both the scientific work of Marx and Darwin and the religious faith of the prophets, I believe in a better future. It was my former belief that the new order could be introduced by education, although, as H. G. Wells said, it was a race between education and catastrophe. The realism of Marx opened my eyes to the fact that we are not at the present winning that race. Thirteen centuries of Anglo-Saxon higher education, nineteen centuries of the prevailing type of religion, and twenty-six centuries of the influence of the prophets, so far as most liberals and idealists are concerned, have neither achieved nor even boldly demanded an order of economic justice. Slavery did not, feudalism did not, capitalism has not. We have not yet escaped from the last of these systems of exploitation. Writers, edu-

cators and ecclesiastics, as well as employers and workers, are almost all conditioned, paralyzed or blinded by the economic system of our day.

But the system is doomed. It will pass over into something better as the other two exploiting systems did before it. Whether, then, by education or by catastrophe, or *by both*, as in all past history; whether by evolution or by revolution, or by both, as heretofore, the new order will come, if there is any truth in the dialectic process or in idealistic faith. And let us notice that these two need not of necessity be incompatible or contradictory. Though all periods of transition are fraught with suffering for multitudes, it is my unshaken conviction that a better day is coming, though I am not blind to the frightful risk, nor to the evils of many of the methods that will be used in the future as they have been in the past. If progress is often, though not always, through conflict, if advance may come by both education and catastrophe, even though the former is infinitely better, then strikes and depressions, for instance, will not be meaningless. They will not discourage us if they are the inevitable growing pains of the social order. If the darkest hour must come before the dawn, still the new day dawns!

At several points I must part company with Marx and find myself in radical disagreement with him:

1. I do not believe that violent revolution is inevitable, nor do I believe that it is desirable in itself as Marx almost makes it. When once violence is adopted as a method in an inevitable and "continuing revolution," when to Marx's philosophy is added Lenin's false dictum that "great problems in the lives of nations are solved *only by force*," most serious consequences follow wherever communism is installed under a dictatorship or prepared for by violent methods. This shuts the gates of mercy on mankind. In Soviet Russia all prosperous farmers are counted kulaks, and the kulak becomes the personal devil or scapegoat of the system, as does the Jew in Nazi Germany. Intellectuals and engineers are all too easily accused of deliberate sabotage, of being "wreckers," class enemies, etc. When this philosophy—that great problems are solved "only by violence"—is applied, then trials, shootings and imprisonment follow in rapid succession. Hatred and violence mean wide destructive and incalculable human suffering.

2. As a natural outgrowth of the doctrine of the inevitability of a violent transition are the methods adopted by the Communist Party to foment strife and hasten the revolution by every possible means where it has not yet occurred. Violence, vulgarity, slander, hatred, falsehood, misrepresentation and brawling must be freely used and are used. A typical example was found in the protest meeting held in Madison Square Garden, New York City, when the Socialists endeavored to aid the suffering workers of Austria, but where the meeting was broken up by the communists who were much more anxious to discredit the socialists than they were to aid the working class of Austria.<sup>1</sup>

3. I cannot agree with Marx that the proletariat is the one and only

<sup>1</sup> See the report of the Civil Liberties Union upon the responsibility for this disgraceful riot.



messianic class, just as the Jews are not the only chosen people. This is a reversion to primitivism, the last instance of which we have seen in Hitler's Nordic racialism. Marx unconsciously drew more from Judaism than he realized. In more senses than one, the Jews in the crucible of vicarious suffering become a truly messianic race to humanity. Tolstoi and many others have seen the call to vicarious sufferers to become human liberators. Marx, instead of a chosen people, conceives of a chosen class—the suffering proletariat—which is to be the only deliverance for humanity. This class has absolute and unique value and it alone is to bring in the classless society. Under a favorable environment human nature itself is to be changed so that government of force will be no longer needed. The values of this class are so unique and absolute that it is supposed to be justified in destroying all enemy classes, such as the urban bourgeois and the rural kulak. Individuals in these classes and the classes themselves have no rights, while the proletariat has all rights.

We admit that Marx's faith in the common man was not misplaced, that the workers have shown that they have enormous power and possibilities. Yet they have not proved to be a divine or messianic class. The middle class also has revealed possibilities which Marx did not foresee. The doctrine of a messianic class has caused and tried to justify great cruelty in Russia, yet it has not produced, nor is it in the way of producing, the classless or well-nigh perfect social order which was vainly expected upon the false premise of its messianic character. Such prophecy is not realism but primitivism.

4. Finally, I disagree fundamentally with Marx as to the nature of reality. It may be conceived as mechanical, as organic or as superorganic. Mechanically conceived, the universe may be considered as a heartless machine, and man an automaton of fate, all his actions like the cogs of a machine bound by a rigid determinism. A man may then use his fellows as instruments for making money in a heartless and sordid materialism. No man more than Marx repudiated such mechanistic determinism or more demanded freedom from slavery to things and machines.

Or, second, reality may be conceived, with Hegel and Marx, as an organic process. As we have seen, Hegel conceives it idealistically as the self-realization of the Idea in history. Marx, in his dialectical materialism, takes up the mechanical relationships into his wider organic interpretation. But there is a third form of relationship that is superorganic, of which friendship would be a type. Such personal relationships are not merely mechanical, or organic, they are not in the dialectic process of becoming something else. So long as life lasts they abide. Social life is not of the nature of the mechanics of the machine nor of a biological organism. It moves on a higher plane of reality and experience. Personal reality is superorganic.

When Herbert Spencer says that we are everywhere in the presence of an infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed, we may ask whether that energy is like matter or like mind; whether it is like the lowest or the highest that is known? Is it merely mechanical, and the universe a heartless machine? Is it organic, and the universe only a vast cosmic process? Or is there intelligence and purpose at the heart of it?

I conceive Reality to be not mechanistic nor organic, but superorganic. I feel concerning Marx as Wordsworth did concerning the abstract materialism of the early nineteenth century, that *something had been left out*. Humanists, religionists, liberals and even radicals of various schools of thought will not be appealed to by the drab monotony of the materialistic mass life of the economic man in Russia, which incarnates Marx's philosophy at this point. Even after long struggle, when material abundance has been gained, they will probably become more than ever aware that man cannot live by bread alone.

Thus, though I acknowledge my real debt to Marx, I do not count myself a Marxist. I have stated elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> the reasons which would make impossible my acceptance of the system as practised in Soviet Russia under the dictatorship: Its denial of political liberty, the violence and compulsion of a continuing revolution, and the dogmatic atheism and anti-religious zeal required of every member of the Communist Party.

In spite of these evils I believe that the two most important experiments being tried in the world today are the Russian experiment in justice and the American experiment in liberty. Each is one-sided and imperfect. American capitalism virtually denies justice to great masses of the unemployed, to the poor, the dwellers in the slums, to twelve million segregated Negroes, to farmers who have lost their farms and home owners who have lost their homes. The Russian experiment denies liberty. To those who are not subservient to the party line, Russia often becomes a vast prison. Not one per cent of the population is allowed to leave the Soviet Union.

As they are today, neither of these systems is good enough nor is it fit to survive. From the imperfect thesis and antithesis of these two unsatisfactory extremes there must in time arise a higher synthesis which shall unite justice and liberty, the rights of the many and of the one, social control and individual initiative. This may be found, not in the injustice of capitalism nor in the tyranny of communism, but in some form of socialism as the final term. This is for me the meaning of Marx.

## THE MEANING OF MARX

by SIDNEY HOOK

### I. *On Understanding Marx*

NOTHING confirms so strikingly Marx's claim that social thought and action feed into each other than the history of Marx interpretation. Whether it is a conservative professor of political economy seeking to lay a death trap for the "big, bad wolf" of economic theory, or a liberal publicist who damns Marx with faint praise for having discovered, "but unfortunately over-

<sup>1</sup> *Russia Today: What Can We Learn From It?* by Sherwood Eddy. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 316 pages, student edition \$1. Eddy and Page, 347 Madison Avenue, New York City.

emphasized," certain truths about the social process, or a fascist apologist who identifies Marxism with any decent thing he wants to destroy, or an orthodox socialist who thinks that because Marx proved that the revolution was inevitable, the only practical policy is to devote oneself to social reform, or a Stalinist who regards Marxism as a closed, systematic theory of the universe, i.e., as a religion in everything but name, or a communist, in the sense in which Marx and Engels use the term in the *Communist Manifesto*, for whom Marxism is the theory and practice of social revolution—each one of them brings to the study and interpretation of Marx a contemporary purpose and social allegiance which strongly influence his quest for the meaning of Marx.

The purpose and allegiance may be conscious; more often it is unconscious. But conscious or unconscious, it determines the selection, incidence and emphasis of the exposition and the criteria by which the exposition is evaluated. No one can pretend to offer "the whole meaning" of Marx because there is no such thing. The implications of his statements are infinite and they cannot all be seen at once. Even if they could, the question of which ones were more relevant to his intent than others would raise the problem again in another form.

Does this mean that no objective interpretation of Marx is possible and that any one of a myriad of possible interpretations is as good as any other? Not at all. An objective interpretation is a scientific interpretation, and whoever desires to present a scientific interpretation must conform to the procedures established by scientific methodology. The first requisite is to recognize one's own purpose and allegiance in order to prevent as much as possible cooking the facts, straining texts, explaining away inconvenient details, etc. The second is to formulate an hypothesis of Marx's meaning of such a kind that as new manuscripts and historical items come to light they can be used as a check upon its adequacy. The third—and it is here that the heavy apparatus of scholarship enters—is critically to evaluate the relative weight of the available texts, to trace the *development* of Marx's thought, to examine the *apparent* contradictions in his writings in the light of the contrary doctrines of his different opponents, and by relating Marx's doctrines to his own revolutionary career against the background and context of the social and political struggles of the times, catch the spirit and *rationale* of his thought. My documented findings in pursuit of this task, I have given elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Here I content myself with a bald summary of what I take the meaning of Marx to be.

## 2. *What Is the Dialectic Method?*

Marxism is primarily a method of social action—more particularly, the theory and practice of social revolution. One of the distinctive features which sets Marx's thought off from that of other men and movements professing to share the same ultimate social goal is its insistence upon the organic unity between a theory and its practical consequences in any

<sup>1</sup> *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*. New York: John Day, 1933. And in a forthcoming volume *From Hegel to Marx*. I wish to thank the John Day Publishing Co. for permission to quote some passages from the first-named book.

specific field. The life of thought is to be found in what it commits us to and the meaning of any action in what it reveals about past or future actions. The connection between theory and practice exists whether we know it or not, but *scientific* theory and practice is possible only when we become *conscious* of the connection. The scientific temper does not consist in a preference for the facts of experience over against theory, but in the capacity to recognize how facts are determined and what they confirm or disprove. Ordinary unreflective experience is shot through with more theory than we are ever aware of—theory which is expressed or revealed in *habits* of action. When we reflect upon these habits of action and ask questions about their origin, scope and validity, they become *plans* of action—plans which guide subsequent behavior and enable us by checking the consequences of controlled behavior to change, within limits, the physical and social world as well as ourselves.

For Marx every theory, then, is a guide to action of some determinate sort. Its meaning is an implicit prediction that certain consequences will follow upon certain actions; and in truth or falsity is established by the set of actions which realizes or fails to realize the predicted consequences. This is the basic proposition in Marx's methodology. There are some who subscribe to this as far as knowledge of nature is concerned but who believe that in other domains different methods of achieving knowledge are possible. For Marx, however, although the qualities and categories of experience differ as we go from the inorganic to the organic, and from the organic to the social and psychological, all knowledge in so far as it is a matter of knowledge and not of value or preference is to be won by the painstaking methods of experimental science which give truths that are reliable without being certain, and relative without being subjective.

From this theory of meaning, truth and knowledge there follows a complete rejection of any form of supernaturalism in religion and idealism in philosophy. The essence of all religion and idealism is the belief that in and behind appearances there is some moral force or power which gives meaning to the universe and the lives of men within it. Whether this power is called God or Reality or the Absolute, whether it is celebrated by church ritual or not, is immaterial. Common to all varieties of religion and idealism is the further belief that since the cosmic order is a moral order, scientific knowledge, which explains phenomena only in terms which are empirically verifiable or logically inferable from experienced data, cannot be a true account of things. To the idealist something has been left out. To the Marxist if anything has been left out it is not relevant to knowledge or, if relevant to knowledge, capable of being known by further application and extension of scientific method. To the Marxist to speak of the meaning of the universe is meaningless, for there is no intelligible way of testing its presence; and the only values, purposes, teleologies and moralities he can admit into discussion are the verifiable behavior patterns of *men* in definite social and historical situations, and not cosmic processes which in themselves are neither good nor bad. In this consists Marx's basic materialism. Wherever he uses the term materialistic, it is interchangeable with the term scientific. In order not to confuse Marx's materialism with specific, tenta-

tively held, scientific doctrines of the nature of matter, which change with the progress of science, it is best to characterize it as naturalism.<sup>1</sup>

Marx's naturalism does not strip the world of any of its dimensions or impoverish experience of any of its colors or glories. It recognizes an order of structural dependence among qualities. But since all natural structure is revealed in a *temporal* process, there is always an element of novelty, freshness and irreducible difference in situations. Yet no situation can be completely novel, for if it were it could not be recognized and could have no ascertainable history. That is why the past, although relevant to the future, cannot *completely* determine the future, and why knowledge of the past, although a legitimate hypothesis is understanding the present and predicting the future, must be continually tested by the deliverances of experience. There are no a priori truth, hard and fast dogmas, or certainties of any kind in Marx, although the same cannot be said for many who call themselves Marxists.

Since for Marx human thinking—which always involves at some point specific activity—is a natural process in a world of natural processes, there is no more mystery about its capacity to understand and, in part, to control the world than there is in the power of our hands to grasp, our feet to walk and our eyes to see. But, although there is no mystery about thinking, there are difficulties. These difficulties arise from the fact that although all things in the world undergo more or less change in time, we strive to understand them in terms, meanings and laws which are alleged to have no temporal reference and are laid down as true independently of time. But from Marx's naturalism there follows that there is no logical guarantee that any idea or law is completely true, or if true that the situation described will always remain the same. This makes knowledge not only part of a self-correcting process but of an *historical* process; and laws not only approximations of concrete situations but historical approximations.

The recognition that all things are really processes is as old as Heraclitus, but the most comprehensive formula describing the process was developed and applied by Hegel. Any phase of a process in time in relation to the preceding phase reveals three characteristics which may be given in the three Latin phrases, *conservare, negare* and *elevare*. This means that in relation to the previous phase, the subsequent phase (1) preserves some recognizable features of the first, (2) destroys others, (3) exhibits new qualities which may differ slightly or markedly from the old. This abstract scheme was used by Hegel to deduce matters of fact and to claim that every synthesis—every change from one phase to another—was "higher" in an ethical sense than the one preceding. As a materialist, Marx criticized him severely for this and employed the formula only as a general description of the processes of change. The concrete meaning of the formula varies with the special field in which it is used, and with the particular problems in the field. As Marx uses it, it justifies neither the cosmic optimism of Christian socialists nor that of the orthodox Russian dialectical materialists, both of which are essentially, if not equally, religious.

<sup>1</sup> Sidney Hook, *Is Marxism Compatible with Christianity?* in the symposium *Christianity and Marxism*, Polemic Publishers, New York, 1934.

The attempt to understand temporal processes by a formal logic which asserts its propositions as if the world were composed of sharply separated elements fixed in unchanging patterns imposes a difficult task of correcting for the natural fluidities, indeterminancies and twilight zones which all thought, at the beginning of its analysis, must ignore. Things change under our hands while we are treating them, that which does not lie within our view has many concealed relations to that which does, and the action by which we test truth transforms to some extent the situation we would explore. Thinking, as the history of science illustrates, is a continuous and never altogether successful attempt to catch up with our living and doing. This is not a deficiency of thought but its nature. Marx died before he was able to carry through his plan to write a dialectical logic. If he had been able to do it, it would have been a treatise on the fundamental concepts of scientific method, for that is all that dialectical logic is.

Now, although every Marxist must subscribe to all this, the converse is not true; it is possible for one to embrace a thorough-going naturalism in metaphysics and logic without being a Marxist. Let us see why.

Marxism, we have said, is a guide to action. But to what kind of action? To social action which aims by the revolutionary transformation of society to introduce a classless socialist society. That is its goal. *Every Marxist must be socialist*—his thinking, planning and acting are directed towards achieving socialism. The scientific method by which he achieves it distinguishes the Marxist from other socialists. But the goal is an integral part of his action, otherwise he could not distinguish himself from those who would use scientific knowledge to *oppose* socialism. Now the choice of one goal or ideal rather than another is not determined by any cosmic forces. It is a human activity. To be sure, at any given time, the character, number and possibility of realization of ideals are conditioned by a complex of social and economic forces. But the choosing of any specific goal on the part of an individual or of a class does not flow from knowledge but from interests, needs and the will which is rooted in them. Knowledge, of course, will influence interest and will, but it is even truer to say that interest and will use knowledge for their own purposes. Why different class interests express themselves in conflicting goals and ethical ideals, we shall examine below, but the facts that socialism is a class ideal whose validity is established not by logical proof but in successful class struggle, has important bearings upon the conduct of that struggle. Marxism, then, since it frankly accepts the class ideal, is not a science, but a scientific method of achieving socialism. Science is ethically neutral: the social purposes to which it is put cannot be deduced from its systematic propositions.

The class goal of Marxism is to introduce a society in which classes no longer exist. Does not this prove that it is a "higher" and "truer" goal than any others? Not necessarily. It is so only for those who choose it. It is certainly not so in the eyes of those classes whom it destroys in the process. As will be argued later—if it is not evident to the reader already, whoever speaks of Marxism as a science is really asserting that Marxism is a religion according to which the nature of the world is such that "the good"—socialism—*must* come to pass.

3. *The Marxian Theory of History*

The chief field in which Marx applied his scientific method is history. His conclusions here represent his greatest contributions to the intellectual heritage of mankind. They cannot be dissociated from the method and philosophical assumptions by which he arrives at them, but for purposes of exposition they may be stated without most of the supporting arguments.

Marx's theory of history does not involve a fatalism or a necessitarianism of any kind. It is his "orthodox" disciples who are responsible for that myth. The very meaning of the term theory in Marx—which is indissoluble from practice—indicates that Marx's historical materialism is not merely a method of reading history but of making it. If anything else were needed we could point to Marx's temporalism, his view that all social laws are historically conditioned, his insistence that what distinguishes the history and society of man from, say, the history and society of a colony of bees or ants is that human behavior is activity in pursuit of consciously formulated plans, purposes and ends.

Man makes his own history but he does not make it under any old conditions or circumstances. For one thing, at any given time there are men who want to do different things, whose purposes conflict and crisscross so that the existence of one group of people making history becomes a limiting condition upon the historical activity of others. But more important, an examination of what people act for, of the content and objects of their will, reveals that the meaning of their actions can be understood only by taking note of other things besides their mere willing. To understand the activities of men we must understand the society in which they live—the values, habits, traditions, in short, the whole complex of institutions and ideologies which make up their culture. In any given culture people will want different things because they are different people, and because their positions in that culture, and therefore their needs and lacks, will be different. But what they all want will be contained within a common frame of social reference which makes possible things no other culture can achieve and which people living in these different cultures may not even be able to conceive. Our desires to regulate or not to regulate interstate commerce, profits, wages, aviation, divorce, child-care, traffic in opium, poison gas and disease germs would have been incomprehensible to people living under the slave system of antiquity or in feudal France of the twelfth century just as the controversy over forms of address, religious ceremonial and orthography, monastic discipline, and the order and kinds of tithes of earlier cultures can be understood only by analogy today.

All human actions—all human beings—in so far as they have historical significance, are related to the culture of their times; they are, in more than a metaphorical sense, parts of their culture. Cultures, however, are distinguished from each other by definite characters and qualities. Even though there are traces of earlier cultures always present in those which have developed out of them, and even though borrowings and mutual influences between any two contemporary cultures are always going on, it is commonly recognized that their patterns of life, feeling, thought and action are markedly different from each other. Compare, for example, the life por-

trayed in Homer's *Iliad*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Balzac's *César Birotteau*, and a novel by any contemporary Russian writer; or compare the ideas expressed in Plato's *Dialogues*, Aquinas' *Summa Theologia*, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and what passes for dialectical materialism in the Soviet Union; or compare the control of action, as evidenced in the legal codes, of Roman law, Canon law, modern Anglo-American law and Soviet law. Similar series in art, religion and manners can be drawn. The differences revealed in any particular series go much deeper than variations in formal detail. And if we juxtapose identically ordered terms in the above series—say, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Aquinas' *Summa Theologia*, and Canon law—we cannot help but observe clearly discernible, even if inexact, correlations among them. So much so, that if we want to understand any one of these cultural facts we must not only analyze its own formal structure but take into account a complex of other cultural facts as well.

This was brought home to Marx when he attempted to investigate the legal relations and political forms of the society in which he lived. But the realization that a study of law must go beyond law, to a consideration of other cultural and social forces which were influencing it, was only the first step in Marx's intellectual voyage of discovery. For law is influenced by religion, education, philosophy, political struggles, economic needs, and it influences them all in turn. There is no one cultural activity which is found by itself, nor is any one social institution temporally prior to the others. They are all found together in a living unity of interacting processes and parts. How then account for the general character or pattern which one form of society takes over against another? Which particular factor or situation can be regarded as the key or clue to the whole picture of social relationships? Marx set about answering this question in the same way the reader would if he were asked to pick out what factor in modern society exercised the greatest influence upon the multiform activities of life today. Whether it be the laws made, the buildings in which we are housed, the number of marriages, suicides or unemployed, the character and extent of our education, amusement, advertising, military services—Marx would claim that the influence of the economic relations under which we live and their consequences was predominant. Exact measurement is impossible, but if we take any institution and examine the conditions under which it functions and the factors which influence its functioning, or analyze any cultural activity and try to account for the discrepancies between ideals which it professes to realize and what it actually achieves, Marx's thesis can be empirically established. Marx himself did not work out the details in all fields, but on the basis of his own legal and historical studies, and of earlier critical analyses by French socialists like Fourier, he laid down the fundamental principles of what has since then been called "the materialistic interpretation of history." According to this theory, the social relations of production "constitute the real foundations on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness." If the culture of society be regarded as a living whole, then, in terms of another metaphor which Marx employs, political economy is its anatomy.

The social relations of production express the way in which productive



forces and conditions are at any given time organized by the social activity of man. They represent the *mode* of economic production, and property relations are their legal seal. It is these relations which enable us to distinguish between a slave, feudal, capitalist and socialist economy. Of course, cultures can be characterized and classified in innumerable other ways, but none of them enables us to organize the material of cultural life in a manner so relevant and practical to the purposes of social revolution.

Social relations of production are not something tacked on to the economic behavior of man; they are the indispensable conditions of productive activity, for they regulate the processes by which the material products of labor are distributed. Under private ownership of the means of production, the manner, form and extent to which the total social product is divided between the class holding legal title to the means of production and the class working them (whether they be slaves, serfs or wage-workers) depend not upon the good or bad intentions of this man or that, but upon the set of social relations which exist independently of the will of those who are engaged in production. A man finds himself an employer or an employee, a feudal lord or a serf, a slave or a slave holder. Some few individuals may succeed in changing their status, but no class as a whole can do so without revolutionizing the existing system of social relations. The objective sources of the antagonisms between classes—defined by the rôle they play in the organization of production—are located not in the consciousness or unconsciousness of individual members of the class but in the division of the fruits of production. To insure the continuance of this division against overt or potential efforts to overthrow it on the part of "enemies" within and without, to eliminate the frictions which flow from this division and hence facilitate an ever easier and ever greater appropriation of the product by the possessing class, the property relations must of necessity be backed up by extra-economic power. The state is the institution and instrument through which the legal relations receive their ultimate physical sanctions. No class can retain its dominant power in production unless it controls directly or indirectly the state apparatus. All political life, then, and all history in so far as it revolves around a struggle for the mastery of state power, is to be explained, according to Marx, in terms of the class conflicts generated in the process of production. Behind the public conflicts of slogans, principles and personalities will be found conflict of class and group interests which exercise unremitting pressure upon every phase of social policy.

The division of society into classes gives rise, even within the general framework of the same culture, language and folk traditions, to different needs, tastes and values, and ultimately to different ways of looking at the world. This is in part due to the character of occupational activities. A mechanic will develop a different outlook upon things from that of the farmer and the general attitudes of both will differ from those of bankers, generals and their kind. But the chief differences will be determined not by vocational distinctions but by the desire to preserve the existing social order or to transform it. Political, ethical, religious and philosophical systems are reared on values which may be universal in form but never in fact. No matter how far removed their shining summits may appear to be from

the murk and grime of life, they all turn out upon analysis to be relevant in some way to the struggle for social power. And this even when they profess—as most religions do—not to be concerned with it. A struggle for survival and domination goes on between ideas no less than between classes. Since those who control the means of production also control directly or indirectly, the means of publication—the press, school, cinema, radio—the prevailing ideology always tends to consolidate the power and strengthen the authority of the dominant class. “In every epoch,” wrote Marx, “the ruling ideas have been the ideas of the ruling class.”

This was Marx's working hypothesis of how contemporary society was organized. In its light he examined the cultures of other societies and approached the even more important problem of how one society develops out of another. If the social relations of production were the central structural factor in the life of society, it was natural to infer that in its functioning the chief driving force of social development could be found. In every social system Marx observed a continuous change in the material forces and conditions of production. The forces of production include not only physical instruments, but the available knowledge, skills and techniques; the conditions of production are given by raw materials, climate, population, etc. In early societies, where production is carried on by primitive means and methods, changes are often occasioned by natural phenomena such as the desiccation of rivers or the exhaustion of the soil. The more significant changes, and particularly so in modern societies, take place in the development of the instruments of production. Capitalism, for example, in its quest for profit strained every effort to improve the efficiency of its productive forces while slavery, wherever the population was abundant and slaves easily procurable, discouraged such improvement. But in all societies in the course of their development a point is reached where the forces of production come into conflict with existing property relations. This is the point where it no longer becomes possible on the basis of the method by which income is being distributed to permit the available productive agencies (whether they be slaves, wage workers or machines) to function to full capacity; it is a point where the great masses of human beings out of whose labor all social value and capital have come, cannot be sustained by the social system in which they live. It then becomes recognized that “from forms of development of the forces of production the relations of production turn into their fetters.”

The class which suffers most from the operation of the existing mode of production becomes revolutionary and seeks political power in order to strike off the fetters which prevent the widest expansion of productive forces. It asserts itself as a self-conscious, independent political force, and develops along all cultural lines a revolutionary ideology to aid it in its struggles for power. Every class struggle is at the same time a political struggle, for the state cannot really be neutral in class conflict. The class struggle carried to successful completion must be directed against the existing state. The struggle for state power in its acute stage ends either “in a revolutionary transformation of the whole society or in the common doom of the contending classes.”

The struggle between the capitalist and proletarian classes represents

the last historic form of fundamental social opposition, for in that struggle it is no longer a question of which class should enjoy ownership of the social means of production but of the existence of their private ownership as such. The abolition of private ownership of the social means of production spells the abolition of all economic classes. This can be accomplished only through the rule of a workers' state which permits the widest democracy for those who engage in socially useful labor but which functions as an open dictatorship against those who would restore the old system and its evils. Political power is to be consolidated by the workers' state and used in such a manner as to effect as rapidly as possible the transition from a profit-making economy, with its anti-social ideals and incentives, to a coöperative commonwealth in which "the free development of all is the condition for the free development of each."

This, all too briefly, is Marx's theory of history. There is no space to discuss the fascinating problems which it opens up, the difficulties its application involves, and the many objections which have been urged against it by numerous critics. I have done my best to deal with them in other writings. Here I wish to restrict myself to a few remarks. A great many of the criticisms directed against Marx turn out upon consideration of Marx's own writings and manuscripts to be valid not against Marx but against arrogant and incompetent, self-styled "orthodox" Marxists who have a tendency to reduce all culture—especially those phases of it about which they are confidently ignorant—to economic equations of the first degree. The flexibility and sharpness of Marx's historical method must be judged by the way in which Marx uses it and not by the way in which people who have not even taken the trouble to read him carefully bungle with it—like children playing with their grandfather's sword. Secondly, many hostile critics of Marx assume that since Marx did not at any one place say everything at once, he could not have been aware of the existence of some common features of human experience. Because Marx, in attempting to explain the evolution of economic institutions and cultural forms of class societies, asserts that all history is the history of class struggle, it is rash to assume that he was unaware of the fact that human beings love, play and watch the stars in all epochs—class struggle or no class struggle. But he was interested in human history not from the point of view of the chronicler of the arts of love or the historian of man's imaginative flights—and even these must know something of Marx's method to give us plausible accounts of their subject—but primarily from the point of view of a social revolutionist living in capitalist society and trying to understand the conditions under which the emancipation of the working classes could be achieved. To forget this is to forget to apply Marx's own historical insight to himself and his work. Yes, Marx had a point of view and although it is quite true that one cannot see everything from a point of view, it is even truer that without a point of view one cannot see anything at all.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that Marx is not at all interested in the personal motive behind individual activity. Whoever uses Marxism to explain any particular act of any particular personality sets himself down as an—well, let us say, as an un-Marxian. It is the behavior and ideology of classes and groups and their subdivisions which is Marx's primary con-

cern. He seeks to understand them not in terms of the personal motivations of their individual components—which have an enormous range—but in terms of objective social processes which have a direction not deducible from any knowledge of individual psychology. Human beings always have motives, generally too complex and obscure even for themselves to be quite clear about. But the historical effects of human activities are resultants of these activities with each other and with the objective conditions of their environment. The resultant effects of the behavior of many individuals can be correlated with and explained by the movement of certain social factors in their environment. Great men, of course (*vide* Marx himself), play a necessary and indispensable rôle, but social events of importance do not take place merely because this or that individual has this or that ideal, but because the movement of environmental forces continually limits the range and efficacy of their ideals and operates as a selective agency until only those ideals or alternative paths of action remain open, which correspond to the genuine objective possibilities of the historical situation. Voluntary human activity is presupposed throughout. It is free and effective, however, only to the extent to which human effort is informed by the knowledge of the conditions, limits and powers of the world it sets out to transform.

#### 4. *Marx's Economics*

Marx's economic doctrines represent an application of his historical method to the processes of capitalist production. He attempts to lay bare the mechanism by which profit is extracted, wages determined and the conditions for a new social order established. The technical problems involved in Marx's economic theories, their difficulties and contradictions, real or apparent, cannot be treated here. Suffice it to say that whoever passes the threshold of *Capital* finds himself involved in a knotty tangle of problems some of which Marx himself did not solve. Like most of his other writings, *Capital* is an unfinished work—a torso whose internal structure is sufficient to disprove the absurd claim that Marx left a finished system behind him.<sup>1</sup>

Although dependent upon the inquires of English classical economy, Marx's starting point is radically different. In conformity with his method sketched above, it is historical. The economic qualities, relations and laws which we observe in our society are not things existing *in rerum natura*, nor do they obtain in all other societies and historical periods. Wealth in our society takes the form of "an immense accumulation of commodities." It was not always that the products of labor were as a rule commodities nor

<sup>1</sup> Critics of all kinds, especially the orthodox idolaters, seem to be singularly unaware of the significance of the manuscript history of *Capital*. Vol. I was published in 1867. Most of the first part had already been drafted ten years earlier. Considerable of what Engels published twenty-five years later as Vol. III—indeed, the most important parts of it—was written before 1867. From 1867 to 1883, the year in which Marx died, a period of sixteen years elapsed in which Marx published no continuation of Vol. I. I for one do not believe that Marx would ever have finished his *Capital* without making some fundamental revisions in Vol. I and stressing especially the way in which "demand" enters constitutively in the concept of "socially necessary labor-power." The period from 1867 to 1883 is precisely the period when the doctrines of Jevons and the Austrian school caught on. Engels could very well have transferred his "Hier bricht das Manuskript ab" with which *he* closes Vol. III to Vol. I.

were the laws which govern the production and distribution of wealth today always the same. In the past, however, it was easier to understand the character of the wealth produced, who produced it and how it was divided. In capitalist society, as the frantic succession of economic nostrums indicate, there is little understanding of the nature of economic processes. Explanations of the "mysteries" of prices, profit, wages, overproduction, small and large scale depressions are sought exclusively in the subsidiary mechanisms of credit, finance, currency, taxes, imports and exports, technological progress and obsolescence, and not in the social relations of production—which are ultimately relations between human beings—that determine and pervade all economic behavior, institutions and instrumentalities. The social relations between human beings are "thingified" into impersonal, static and invariable patterns, taken for granted as so many other passive natural elements, while their material agencies and products are "personified" into the directing forces of human destiny. Man finds himself ruled by the products (commodities) of his own hands. The history and relationships of these products "vary continually, independently of the will, foresight and action of the producers. To them their own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them." The whole of capitalist economy consists of a process in which things carry on, so to speak, behind man's back. It is a process which makes a mockery of man's strivings for security, comfort and peace by producing unemployment, want and war. The conjuncture of the market does not merely affect prices but life, love, home, education, morals—the most intimate personal relationships. Instead of the instruments of production being utilized by human beings for collective social purposes, in capitalist society human beings, even though they are nominally legally free agents, are utilized as instruments of production for the creation of profits. It is not only in Samuel Butler's fantasy of industrialism run mad that human beings are the instruments of production used by machines for the manufacture of bigger and better machines. That is what they tend to become in the practice and theory of commodity-producing societies. This is what Marx means when he calls bourgeois society a "fetishism of commodities" and the orthodox "science" of political economy, its theology.

The primary importance of the doctrine of the "fetishism of commodities" in Marx helps to make two things clear. First, it explains why the subtitle of his *Capital*—"A Critique of Political Economy"—is a precise description of its contents. It is a criticism of all the fundamental concepts of economics designed to show that social life is not an organization of *things* but of human relations in an historical process of development. And, second, it indicates quite clearly that Marx's critique of capitalism is not a purely immanent one, that it is not a complement to the economic findings of his predecessors and contemporaries but that it presupposes a normative point of view, an ideal of how society can be organized on the basis of large scale machine production which will restore to man control, within natural limits, of his own social history. The standpoint from which Marx's critique is made is the standpoint of the working classes whose historical position, objective needs and problems are such that their solution brings with it the solution of the difficulties of all other socially productive groups

in society, and a better life for all. The Marxian theory of surplus-value cannot be understood without reference to his point of view.

Any attempt to expound Marx's economic theories in independence of his historical doctrines and particularly his doctrine of "the fetishism of commodities"—whose rich implications have not yet been adequately explored—may be dismissed as foreign to Marx's thought. Even where particular problems are approached, the failure to take note of the normative, practical bias of Marx's economics will result in leaving the analysis a complete muddle.

Here, however, I wish to give a formal outline of Marx's economic doctrines, so that the reader may have the key concepts in hand when he turns, as he should, to Marx's own writings.

Capitalism is private ownership of the social means of production carried on for private profit, and employing workers who are formally or legally free to sell their labor-power. It is only under capitalism that labor-power appears on the market like any other commodity. Its value is determined in the same way—viz., by the amount of socially necessary labor-power involved in its production or reproduction—and its price is subject to the same variations of supply and demand as other commodities. Under the ideal or typical conditions of capitalist production, the worker receives in exchange for his labor-power a sum of money equivalent in value to the means of subsistence necessary to sustain him—food, clothing and shelter for himself and family. Like all commodities the use-value of labor-power is different from its exchange-value. But in one respect it is absolutely unlike other commodities. Its specific use-value lies in the fact that it creates more exchange-value than it is itself worth. If labor-power produced no more exchange-value than what it receives in money wages, then the value of the commodities produced would be equal merely to the value of the raw material, machinery and labor-power which entered into its manufacture. Where would profit come in? The capitalist might just as well close up his shop, for the only income he could receive under such circumstances would be the exchange value of his own labor-power, provided he did work in his own plant. But why should he stay in business to give himself a job, when, without risking his capital, he might take a job elsewhere? He can remain in business only so long as there is a difference between the value of the labor-power he has purchased and the value which that labor-power creates. Profit is possible only when the values of the second is greater than the value of the first.

Marx calls that portion of the working day in which the worker produces commodities whose exchange-value (as distinct from the exchange-value of the raw materials, etc.) is equivalent to the exchange-value of his own labor-power, *necessary labor time*; anything over and above this is *surplus labor time*. What is produced during this latter time is surplus-value for which the worker receives no return whatsoever. The ratio between surplus-value and wages (the value of labor-power) Marx calls the *rate* of surplus-value or the rate of exploitation. The profit of capitalist production is derived solely from surplus-value; and the progress of capitalist production consists in devising ways and means by which surplus-value may be increased. There are two generic methods of doing this. One is by

prolonging the length of the working day. In this way *absolute* surplus-value is derived. Another generic method of increasing surplus-value, more in evidence under modern capitalism than in early capitalism, is by increasing the productivity of labor and curtailing the necessary labor time. In this way, even when the length of the working day remains constant, the difference between necessary labor time and surplus labor time increases, and therewith the rate of surplus-value and exploitation. By this means *relative* surplus-value is derived. Surplus-value is not appropriated in its entirety at the point where it is produced, but in the course of the whole process of capitalist production, circulation and exchange. The distribution of the total surplus-value at any time is determined not only by the operation of immanent economic laws but by the *political struggles* between entrepreneur, landowner and bankers; between entrepreneurs themselves even when production has become monopolistic; and, also, between the entrepreneur and the wage earners.

Marx divides the capital of a manufacturing concern into constant capital and variable. Constant capital consists of what orthodox political economy calls fixed capital, such as buildings and machinery, and part of what it calls circulating capital, i.e., power and raw materials. Variable capital consists of wages, which non-Marxian economists regard as only part of circulating capital. The division of capital into constant and variable is made in the interests of Marx's analysis according to which the value of constant capital is reproduced only in the manufactured products, whereas wages, or variable capital, always creates some new value over its own cost of reproduction. The ordinary distinction between fixed and circulating capital reflects the entrepreneur's assumption that the source of profit is not only wage-labor but inanimate instruments of production as well. He, therefore, computes his rate of profit upon the whole of the capital he has sunk into his project and not upon the amount he has advanced as wages. This accounts for the disparity between what is called the rate of profit and the rate of exploitation. For example, in a \$1,000,000 concern, \$900,000 will represent investment in machinery and raw material (which Marx calls *constant* capital C), and \$100,000 wage payments (*variable* capital V). If profit (which is called surplus-value S, since all profit, according to Marx, is produced during surplus labor time) is \$100,000, then the rate of profit is S divided by C plus V, which is 10 per cent. The rate of surplus-value, however, is S divided by V, which is 100 per cent. The larger the rate of surplus-value (which is always being increased by either one or both of the two ways indicated above), the greater the absolute *amount* of profit produced. The total profit is not consumed for personal purposes but a large part of it is reinvested in constant capital; modernization and rationalization is made necessary by the pressure of competition and the quest for even larger profits. The total amount of capital in use grows. In order, however, to keep the *rate* of profit constant, since the total amount of capital has been enlarged, the *amount* of profit and therewith the rate of surplus-value (the rate of exploitation) must be increased. The yearly increment of profit which is added to the capital investment grows together with that to which it is added. The constant capital of today is nothing but the unpaid labor of yesterday. Relatively to the increase in the magnitudes of

constant capital, the amount of variable capital employed in production diminishes. The diminution of the amount of variable capital is attended by a demand for relatively fewer laborers and by a substitution of unskilled for skilled. Wages fall and an industrial reserve army comes into existence.

The rate of profit, as we have seen, is determined by the ratio between surplus-value and the total capital invested. With the increase in the organic composition of capital (i.e., the ratio of constant to variable capital) the rate of profit falls even when the rate of exploitation, or surplus-value, remains the same. The desire to sustain the rate of profit leads to improvement of the plant and to increase in the intensity and productivity of labor. As a result even large and larger stocks of commodities are thrown on the market. The workers cannot consume these goods since the purchasing power of their wages is necessarily less than the values of the commodities they have produced. The capitalists cannot consume these goods because (1) they and their immediate retainers have use for only a part of the immediate wealth produced and (2) the value of the remainder must first be turned into money before it can again be invested. Unless production is to suffer permanent breakdown, an outlet must be found for the surplus of supplied commodities—a surplus which exists not in respect to what people need but to what they can buy. Since the limits to which the home market may be stretched are given by the purchasing power of wages—which constantly diminishes in virtue of the tendency of unemployment to increase with the increase of the organic composition of capital—resort must be had to export.

The first things to be exported are consumption goods: say, Boston shoes to South America, if we are an American manufacturer, and Lancashire textiles to India, if we are English. There was a time when natives had to be taught to use these commodities. But having learned how to use them, they soon desired to learn how to make them. In this they are helped by the manufacturers of shoe machinery in New England and textile machinery in Manchester, who naturally desire to dispose of their *own* commodities. The raw materials are right at hand—Argentine hides in the one case, Egyptian and Indian cotton in the other. They are relatively cheaper than in the mother country, because (a) transportation costs are lower; (b) where land is cheap its products—hides and cotton—are cheap; and (c) the working day is longer. Before long, Argentine shoe plants are underselling the Boston factories and India is “spinning its own.” The Manchester looms lie idle and the New England manufacturers clamor for a tariff even while their stocks remain unmoved. But this is an ever-continuing process. Having learned how to use shoe and textile machinery, what is more natural than that the colonies should wish to learn how to manufacture it? In this they are helped by the manufacturers of *machine tools* in America and England who desire to dispose of their *own* commodities. Before long there is a shoe machinery factory in the Argentine, and India is manufacturing her own looms. Later on, representatives of the U. S. Steel Corporation will be convincing the South Americans and Indians that it would be more profitable to import iron and steel and other materials which enter into the manufacture of machine tools than to buy them ready made. Or natural resources may be discovered which will invite exploita-



tion. A New York or London banking house will advance the money necessary for this capital outlay as it did for the other plants. Interest and profit will be considerable, but none of it will turn a wheel in the many idle factories in New or Old England. If there is a glut on the colonial market, and interest payments cannot be met, the governments of the United States and Great Britain will step in to save their national honor and protect life and property.

This process is accompanied by periodic crises of overproduction. They become progressively worse both in local industries and in industry as a whole. The social relations under which production is carried on, and which makes it impossible for wage workers to buy back at any given moment what they have produced, leads to a heavier investment of capital in industries which turn out production goods than in industries which produce consumption goods. This disproportion between investment in production goods and investment in consumption goods is permanent under capitalism. But since finished production goods must ultimately make their way into plants which manufacture consumption goods, the quantities of commodities thrown on the market, and for which no purchaser can be found, mounts still higher. At the time the crisis breaks, and in the period immediately preceding it, the wage worker may be earning more and consuming more than usual. It is not, therefore, underconsumption of what the worker *needs* that causes the crisis, because in boom times his standard of living is generally higher than in slow times, but his underconsumption in relation to what he *produces*. Consequently, an increase in the absolute standard of living under capitalism, since at most it could only affect the rate and not the tendency to overproduction, would not eliminate the possibility of crisis. That can be done only by the elimination of capitalism as such. Although the standard of living may be higher as production goes from the crest of one boom to another, once the crisis begins, the standard of living declines at an accelerated rate.

The anti-social consequences of the contradiction between the tendency towards ever-expanding forces of production under capitalism and the relatively progressive limitations upon consumption finds its crassest expression not merely in the existence of crises but in the way they are overcome. Despite the crying want of millions of human beings, commodities are deliberately destroyed and basic production systematically curtailed. Even war is sometimes welcomed as the best means of disposing of surplus stocks of commodities—and of the surplus population which the normal progress of capitalism produces. The historical tendency of capitalist production is to go from small scale organization to large; from the exploitation of wage-labor to the expropriation of the capitalist, from isolated action against individuals to the organized overthrow of the system. No one can improve upon Marx's own graphic recapitulation:

"As soon as this process of transformation has sufficiently decomposed the old society from top to bottom, as soon as the laborers are turned into proletarians, their means of labor into capital, as soon as the capitalist mode of production stands on its own feet, then the further socialization of labor and further transformation of the land and other means of production into socially exploited and, therefore, common means of production, as well as

the further expropriation of private proprietors, takes a new form. That which is now to be expropriated is no longer the laborer working for himself, but the capitalist exploiting many laborers. This expropriation is accomplished by the action of the immanent laws of capitalist production itself, by the centralization of capital. One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralization, or this expropriation of many capitalists by few, develop, on an ever-extending scale, the coöperative form of the labor process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labor into the instruments of labor only usable in common, the economizing of all means of production by their use as the means of production of combined socialized labor, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market, and therewith the international character of the capitalist régime. Along with the constant diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolize all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in number, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labor at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.”<sup>1</sup>

### 5. *Marx's Political Theory*<sup>2</sup>

Organically connected with the theories of surplus-value and historical materialism is Marx's view of the class struggle and its overwhelming importance in the political strategy and tactics of the working class. The theory of historical materialism leads us to expect that the different rôles which different classes play in the process of production will give rise to a conflict of needs and interests that tend to express themselves in opposing modes of thought and action in every field of culture relevant to social concerns. And at all times the division of surplus-value, although it follows well-defined economic tendencies, is never an automatic affair but depends upon the political struggles between the different classes engaged in production.

Class struggles, therefore, have their source in certain objective antagonisms in the social relation of production. They are not consciously introduced into society from without; they are the natural consequences of strains and stresses within. None the less, the rôle of socialists in evoking, intensifying and directing class struggles is of tremendous importance. This can be made clear by a variety of considerations. In addition to objective economic antagonisms which divide society, there are a great many other social oppositions, racial, religious, national, sectional and vocational, which

<sup>1</sup> *Capital*, I, pp. 836-837. English translation, Kerr edition.

<sup>2</sup> In this section I am indebted in places to the effective formulations of Marx's position to be found in the Program of the American Workers Party.

cut across the economic antagonisms and often set members of the working class against each other. Further, the existing ideology with which the working class has been indoctrinated teaches them that there are no classes and that what appear to be class antagonisms are simply the results of human "selfishness"—that whipping boy for every social evil which has ever existed. Or it teaches them to think of themselves first as citizens, the equal of all other citizens before the law, and then as members of other social groups of which their class may be one. To the extent to which this ideology takes hold and persists, the smoldering resentments generated by the thousandfold economic oppressions under which workers live never burst into flame; or when they do, they are speedily quenched by appeals to patriotism, the objective interests of the community or whatever other shibboleths to which people have been conditioned to respond. The impact of economic forces—especially when standards of living have been driven down—has a certain educational influence of itself but without the activity of socialists, who may be drawn from all classes but mainly from the oppressed classes, no successful revolutionary movement is likely to develop.

In order to develop and guide class struggles in capitalist society there are, apart from incessant educational activity, three general tasks, all closely connected with each other, which socialists must pursue. First, they will throw themselves into the day-by-day struggles of the working class and help them win by militant action the right to organize and the consequent improvements in working conditions and standards of life. But they never rest with mere demands for better conditions—of pay, hours, relief or insurance. They press on to direct every movement which has been loosed among the workers, every force of social unrest, every protest against suffering, poverty or class injustice, every vague wish for a more equitably ordered society into a direct attack upon the present system itself, into a will to achieve and hold power and to administer that power in the genuine interests of a free society of workers. Second, they must convince intermediate and subordinate groups like the farmers, professionals and different strata of white-collar and civil service employees, that they cannot solve their own problems within the framework of the capitalist system and that only by allying themselves with the working class and changing the existing social order can they find the opportunity for creative and dignified labor. And, third, in order to expose the limits of mere reform and the dangers of class collaboration, and in order to remove the chief ideological obstacles to working-class unity in the struggle for power, the socialists will continually strive to destroy the myth of the impartiality of the state and the illusions by which formal political democratic forms conceal the actual dictatorship of capital.

To accomplish these tasks successfully, clarity concerning the nature of the state and the meaning of dictatorship and democracy is essential. Present political issues make Marx's views on these matters very pertinent. To begin with, the reader must be reminded that according to Marx's historical theories political questions cannot be significantly treated as abstractions divorced from a concrete social situation at a definite time and place. For example, democracy and dictatorship cannot be understood when we merely pose arguments pro and con without asking specifically for *whom* democ-

racy exists and in respect to *what*. The formal disputes concerning democracy and dictatorship are not new. They were already old in Plato's times when slavery was still the dominant mode of production. Now, from the point of view of the slave, the political problems and struggles of his masters as to whether *their* government should be monarchical, aristocratic, republican or democratic had no bearing upon *his* lot and the conditions of *his* life. It made a great deal of difference to his master but whether the slave lived in the Athenian democracy or the Roman empire, he remained a slave and was treated as one. During the feudal period, the political struggles which decided whether the serf was to be oppressed by the ruling trinity of crown, church and nobility, or by one of these, had no immediate bearing upon his mode of life. When later his special support was needed by contending groups of the ruling class to turn the battle one way or another, he was given certain concessions which never transcended (for the class) the limits of the existing social relations. And in modern times, although the workers won the battle for the bourgeoisie in their struggle against the nobility, the essential conditions of their social life remained the same before and after the bourgeoisie took power. They sweated at low wages and bad conditions when there was work, and starved when there was none. They were not at all indifferent to the struggles for political democracy. They used the privilege of franchise, when they ultimately got it, for all it was worth. But they could not help observing that whether they lived and worked in imperial capitalist Germany, in democratic capitalist England, or republican capitalist America their *social* lot was very much the same. When it varied it was not due to the character of the government under which they lived but to such non-political things as the presence of a Continental market, colonial outlets, free land or whatever the specific economic factors may have been.

No matter how democracy may be defined, there is never a demand for democracy in everything nor, as we shall see, a demand for genuine democracy for everyone. A struggle for democracy is always a struggle for particular rights which a possessing class makes it difficult to attain. The historic contest of the democratic claims of the bourgeoisie was the right to buy or sell in the open market, to hire or fire free born laborers, to carry on trade without feudal let, hindrance or tribute. The extension of the franchise was the legal seal of approval upon a social position already gained by more direct methods than those of due process of law. The historic content of the democratic claims of the working class which aided the bourgeoisie to come to power was the right to organize, to control the conditions of work, and to achieve a standard of life above that of animal subsistence. The slow extension of the franchise to the workers was *not* the legal seal of approval upon their rights because they had *not*, like the bourgeoisie, gained social power. Never have the mechanisms of franchise and so-called representative government been the instrumentalities by which social power is attained. The political democracy won by the bourgeoisie made it impossible for the social democratic claims of the workers to be realized, for these could be attained only by eliminating the bourgeoisie as a class. From the point of view of the worker, the political democracy of the bourgeoisie meant the social dictatorship of the bourgeoisie; from the

point of view of the bourgeoisie, the *social* democracy of the worker means the political dictatorship over those—the bourgeoisie—whose control of the instruments of production makes social democracy impossible.

The political question, then, is never a conflict of abstractions. It demands the localization of specific issues achieved by asking, whose democracy and in what? Whose dictatorship and over what? In this way political slogans are related to classes and groups struggling for social power in the world today; their ultimate test will be found in their attitude towards the source of ownership and control of the social instruments of production. From this point of view, when the Fascists today call for political dictatorship or their liberal opponents call for the retention of political democracy—no matter how significant their difference may be in other respects, and especially for the political strategy of the workers who must lead in the fight against fascism—they both represent the same *social* dictatorship over against the working class.

In the light of the foregoing, the reasons for this conclusion should be clear. They flow from the very nature of the rights of private property in the instruments of production. A right is any claim which society stands ready through police and state power to enforce. A right to private property is an enforceable claim to control things and to exclude others from their use. The very existence then of private ownership of the social means of production carries with it definite *power* over the lives of the class which must live by their use. And this independently of the intentions of the owners. The right guaranteed by political democracy to the employer to invest or withdraw investment in this industry or that may affect the possibility and conditions of employment—and everything else in their lives which depend upon them—of thousands upon thousands of workers. The right to private property in land means the power to put off the land all those who cannot meet their dues, rents or obligations, even if such exclusion spells starvation. The right to manufacture anything for the market in the interests of profit means the actual power of the owners as a class to determine what the rest of the population shall consume, and the level, quality and “style” of the consumption as well. In short, the rights which bourgeois democracy was called into existence to enforce, viz., the rights to invest capital and control it, to buy, sell or mortgage land, to merge, water and manipulate stock, to monopolize, store or destroy natural resources, to operate the press and all other means of communication as business enterprises, to control schools and churches—all this gives not only economic power over things but political, social and cultural power over people as well. And when wars break out in the natural course of capitalist economy, this power over those who work and those who fight becomes military and absolute.

Since in capitalist society only a small minority holds ownership, and the actual reins of control, over the means of production, what we really have under the guise of formal democracy is the dictatorship of a minority owning class. Whether they number a million or, according to spokesmen of the ruling class, less (James Gerard, leading Democrat and former ambassador to Germany puts them at 57), is beside the point. Real control is exercised by them and not by the electorate who vote for candidates

selected by political machines tied in a thousand ways by vested property interests. Where the working classes see through this guise and organize themselves, even peacefully, to take over political power as a first step towards changing the social order, the mask of formal democracy is dropped and the capitalist state adopts an open dictatorial form in which "voting" may not be forbidden but in which the illusion that it makes a difference upon the course of affairs is no longer perpetuated. The state, which always functions in strikes, demonstrations and other class conflicts as the defender of the mythical "public" against workers, now stands clearly revealed as "the executive committee which manages the common business of the bourgeoisie."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, this state must be abolished and a workers' state established.

#### 6. *Workers' Democracy Versus "The Dictatorship Over the Proletariat"*

Against the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, Marx opposed the ideal of a workers' or proletarian democracy. His criticism of political democracy in bourgeois society is that it is a sham democracy for workers—a sham democracy because, no matter what their paper privileges may be, the workers cannot control the social conditions of their life.

In the nature of the case, a workers' democracy—based upon collective ownership of the means of production—does not involve democracy for bankers, capitalists and their supporters who would bring back a state of affairs which would make genuine social democracy impossible. Towards these anti-social elements the workers' state functions openly as a dictatorship—not arbitrarily, but in defense of the interests of the working and socially useful elements of the nation in shop, field, mine, school, office and laboratory.

In what way, it may be asked, is a workers' democracy which functions as a dictatorship over the bourgeoisie superior to a bourgeois democracy which functions as a dictatorship over the working class? According to Marx in at least two important respects. First, it expresses the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population, and by providing a social environment in which human values rather than property values are the guiding principles of social control permits the widest development of free and creative personality. Second, as the democratic processes of socialist economy expand and embrace in its productive activities the elements of the population which were formerly hostile, the repressive functions of the state gradually disappear. When all groups have become voluntary and trusted participants in the collective work of society, the distinction between worker and non-worker, proletarian and non-proletarian no longer has political significance, and a society of freedom and democracy for all becomes possible.

For purposes of recapitulation and emphasis, let me repeat that Marxists are not opposed to democracy. They hold that it is possible only in a socialist society where in virtue of a common administration of the means of production, an objective social morality is established which harmonizes by intelligent and voluntary compromise the interests of men. This can be

<sup>1</sup> Further discussion of this and allied themes will be found in my contribution to the Symposium on Communism.

achieved or, if unrealizable, approached as an ideal, only by overthrowing the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, which declares itself to be the enduring expression of democracy, and by establishing a workers' democracy—a dictatorship *over* the bourgeoisie—as a new transitional state form whose repressive functions (army, prisons, etc.) finally disappear in the classless socialist society.

Through what political agencies will the workers' democracy express itself? The political basis of the workers' state will be the occupational activity of its citizens. The Workers' Councils, organized already before the eve of the conquest of power and in whose name the social revolution is carried out, will after the revolution be broadened out to include all the working masses. They will become the democratically administered instrumentalities for organizing and controlling production, administering justice and conducting the national defense. As the expression of the collective will of the workers, *they* are the ultimate source of all authority, responsible to no one but themselves, and the best judge of their own interests.

There are some who call themselves Marxists and communists who conceive the matter differently. According to them, workers' democracy or "the dictatorship of the proletariat" (as Marx in a letter to a friend and in a manuscript criticism of the Gotha program of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany called it) is to be exercised not by the democratically elected representatives of *all* the workers but by the dictatorship of a hierarchically organized political *party*. According to this conception the workers' councils reign but the party rules. The rule is enforced by seeing to it that all the responsible posts in the press, schools and government are filled only by party members, that no non-party workers are elected to the councils except those approved or declared safe by the party, and that all militant workers who express their disapproval of the line of the party find their way to concentration camps or worse. Despite all attempts to wriggle away from the plain implications of this view, it means nothing else than a substitution of the dictatorship of the party for the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is the theory of many communistic sects and the practice of the official Communist Party under Stalin in Russia.

There is not a line or word in Marx which provides the slightest justification for such a position, and, indeed, it runs directly counter to the letter and spirit of his teachings. A dictatorship of the proletariat is a dictatorship over the bourgeoisie and is exercised by the stern use of the state power. A "dictatorship of a party"—some of these "Marxists" actually insist upon the phrase—can be nothing else than a dictatorship by the party over the non-party proletariat, of a small minority over a majority, and exercised like *all* dictatorships by the "judicious" application of armed force. That it should also be claimed that the "dictatorship of the party over the proletariat" is a true workers' democracy, and even that there can be no true workers' democracy without it, is testimony to the fact that a little Marxism, in the absence of logic, knowledge and intellectual sincerity, is a dangerous thing. It can breed such monstrous creations of thought and practice that compared to it Frankenstein's monster can be called the answer to a maiden's prayer. The dictatorship of the party *over* the proletariat must lead, in order for it to be rigidly enforced, to a dictatorship of a ruling

bureaucracy *over* the party. And it is not long before someone becomes pope. And popes, as everyone knows, always rule in the interests of their flock, have special sources of illumination not vouchsafed to others, and the power of excommunication.

In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx described quite differently the relation of communists to the proletariat: "In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletariat in general? The Communists do not constitute themselves a special party over and against other working-class parties. They have no special interests apart from the interests of the proletariat as a whole. They erect no special principles by which to control the proletarian movement." This was written to define the relations of communists to the proletariat *before* the conquest of power. How much truer must it be after power has been won!

### 7. *Marxism and Culture*

The bare outline of the meaning of Marx is intended only as an introduction to the further study of his writings. It cannot suggest the wealth of insight they contain nor reveal the perspective which the Marxian approach to culture opens up. Nor can it indicate the dangers to which an uncritical use of Marxian formulæ is sure to lead. In a Marxian analysis of social, political or cultural events, a comparatively slight difference in emphasis or accent might make all the difference in the world between sense and non-sense. It is therefore necessary to point out that Marxism is not a substitute for knowledge, training, technique and capacity for logical inference. It is a method of extending, enriching and applying these. It is not a paradox but a simple truth that a man who is *only* a Marxist cannot be a good one even at that. The proud claims of Marx, Engels, Lassalle, and other leading socialists that the working class is the heir to all the cultural riches of the past are not vain words. Upon all who speak in their name they impose the duty of keeping abreast with all developments in as many fields of knowledge as possible, of constantly scrutinizing their own beliefs in the light of wider experience without letting such scrutiny prevent vigorous action, of respecting the truth wherever they find it, be it in the camp of friend or enemy, of never forgetting that the conquest of bread is not the be-all and end-all of human existence but only one of the necessary conditions of significant living.

On several occasions Marx was compelled to declare that he was not a Marxist. There was nothing he abominated so much on the part of his disciples as their tendency to substitute an *ipse dixit* for fresh thinking. Although he looms as one of the greatest intellectual figures of modern times and one of the richest personalities of his age, it is not an impiety to his memory to believe that on many things Marx was clearly wrong and that in many situations he felt and acted a petty-bourgeois philistine and not as a lion-hearted revolutionist. The first step towards intellectual stultification is often by way of hero-worship.

What can be legitimately requested of the critic of Marxism is that he judge it by the best of its representatives and not by its worst and to remember that Marxism does not presume to give the whole truth about anything but only the most relevant truths which bear upon the general ideals and



specific purposes guiding class action. What must be demanded of anyone who calls himself a Marxist is not only a knowledge of the writings of Marx, a capacity to apply Marxist analysis to the problems of the present and an ability to detect the true from the false in views declared to be ultra-orthodox and revolutionary, but also support and, wherever possible, active participation in every movement of the working class aiming towards the liberation of itself and the rest of society.

## WHY I AM NOT A COMMUNIST<sup>1</sup>

by BERTRAND RUSSELL

WHEN I speak of a "Communist," I mean a person who accepts the doctrines of the Third International. In a sense, the early Christians were Communists, and so were many medieval sects; but this sense is now obsolete.

I will set forth my reasons for not being a Communist *seriatim*.

1. I cannot assent to Marx's philosophy, still less to that of Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. I am not a materialist, though I am even further removed from idealism. I do not believe that there is any dialectical necessity in historical change; this belief was taken over by Marx from Hegel, without its only logical basis, namely the primacy of the Idea. Marx believed that the next stage in human development *must be* in some sense a progress; I see no reason for this belief.

2. I cannot accept Marx's theory of value, not yet, in his form, the theory of surplus-value. The theory that the exchange-value of a commodity is proportional to the labor involved in its production, which Marx took over from Ricardo, is shown to be false by Ricardo's theory of rent, and has long been abandoned by all non-Marxian economists. The theory of surplus-value rests upon Malthus' theory of population, which Marx elsewhere rejects. Marx's economics do not form a logically coherent whole, but are built up by the alternate acceptance and rejection of older doctrines, as may suit his convenience in making out a case against the capitalists.

3. It is dangerous to regard any one man as infallible; the consequence is necessarily an oversimplification. The tradition of the verbal inspiration of the Bible has made men too ready to look for a Sacred Book. But this worship of authority is contrary to the scientific spirit.

4. Communism is not democratic. What it calls the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is in fact the dictatorship of a small minority, who become an oligarchic governing class. All history shows that government is always conducted in the interests of the governing class, except in so far as it is influenced by fear of losing its power. This is the teaching, not only of history, but of Marx. The governing class in a communist state has even

<sup>1</sup> Printed by permission of the *Modern Monthly*, issue of April, 1934.

more power than the capitalist class in a "democratic" state. So long as it retains the loyalty of the armed forces, it can use its power to obtain for itself advantages quite as harmful as those of capitalists. To suppose that it will always act for the general good is mere foolish idealism, and is contrary to Marxian political psychology.

5. Communism restricts liberty, particularly intellectual liberty, more than any other system except fascism. The complete unification of both economic and political power produces a terrifying engine of oppression, in which there are no loopholes for exceptions. Under such a system; progress would soon become impossible, since it is the nature of bureaucrats to object to all change except increase in their own power. All serious innovation is rendered possible only by some accident enabling unpopular persons to survive. Kepler lived by astrology, Darwin by inherited wealth, Marx by Engels' "exploitation" of the proletariat of Manchester. Such opportunities of surviving in spite of unpopularity would be impossible under Communism.

6. There is in Marx, and in current economic thought, an undue glorification of manual as against brain workers. The result has been to antagonize many brain workers who might otherwise have seen the necessity of socialism, and without whose help the organization of a socialist state is scarcely possible. The division of classes is put by Marxians in practice even more than in theory, too low in the social scale.

7. The preaching of the class war is likely to cause it to break out at a moment when the opposing forces are more or less evenly balanced, or even when the preponderance is on the side of the capitalists. If the capitalist forces preponderate, the result is an era of reaction. If the forces on both sides are roughly equal, the result, given modern methods of warfare, is likely to be the destruction of civilization, involving the disappearance of both capitalism and communism. I think that, where democracy exists, socialists should rely upon persuasion, and should use force only to repel an illegal use of force by their opponents. By this method it will be possible for socialists to acquire so great a preponderance that the final war may be brief, and not sufficiently serious to destroy civilization.

8. There is so much of hate in Marx and communism that communists can hardly be expected, when victorious, to establish a régime affording no outlet for malevolence. The arguments in favor of oppression are therefore likely to seem to the victors stronger than they are, especially if the victory has resulted from a fierce and doubtful war. After such a war, the victorious party is not likely to be in the mood for sane reconstruction. Marxists are too apt to forget the war has its own psychology, which is the result of fear, and is independent of the original cause of contention.

9. It is said that, in the modern world, the only practically possible choice is between communism and fascism. I do not believe this. It seems to me definitely untrue in America, England and France. The future of Italy and Germany is uncertain. England had a period of fascism under Cromwell, France under Napoleon, but in neither case was this a bar to subsequent democracy. Politically immature nations are not the best guides as to the political future.

## WHY I AM NOT A COMMUNIST<sup>1</sup>

by JOHN DEWEY

HAVING had the opportunity to see the contribution of Mr. Bertrand Russell, I have doubts as to whether I can say much that he has not already said. But I begin by emphasizing the fact that I write with reference to being a Communist in the Western world, especially here and now in the United States, and a Communist after the pattern set in the U.S.S.R.

1. *Such* Communism rests upon an almost entire neglect of the specific historical backgrounds and traditions which have operated to shape the patterns of thought and action in America. The autocratic background of the Russian church and state, the fact that every progressive movement in Russia had its origin in some foreign source and has been imposed from above upon the Russian people, explain much about the form Communism has taken in that country. It is therefore nothing short of fantastic to transfer the ideology of Russian Communism to a country which is so profoundly different in its economic, political, and cultural history. Were this fact acknowledged by Communists and reflected in their daily activities and general program, were it admitted that many of the practical and theoretical features of Russian Communism (like belief in the plenary and verbal inspiration of Marx, the implicit or explicit domination of the Communist Party in every field of culture, the ruthless extermination of minority opinion in its own ranks, the verbal glorification of the mass and the actual cult of the infallibility of leadership) are due to local causes, the character of Communism in other countries might undergo a radical change. But it is extremely unlikely that this will take place. For official Communism has made the practical traits of the dictatorship of the proletariat and over the proletariat, the suppression of the civil liberties of all non-proletarian elements as well as of dissenting proletarian minorities, integral parts of the standard Communist faith and dogma. It has imposed and not argued the theory of dialectic materialism (which in the U.S.S.R. itself has to undergo frequent restatement in accordance with the exigencies of party factional controversy) upon all its followers. Its cultural philosophy, which has many commendable features, is vitiated by the absurd attempt to make a single and uniform entity out of the "proletariat."

2. Particularly unacceptable to me in the ideology of official Communism is its monistic and one-way philosophy of history. This is akin to the point made above. The thesis that all societies must exhibit a uniform, even if uneven, social development from primitive communism to slavery, from slavery to feudalism, from feudalism to capitalism, and from capitalism to socialism, and that the transition from capitalism to socialism must be achieved by the same way in all countries, can be accepted only by those who are either ignorant of history or who are so steeped in dogma that they cannot look at a fact without changing it to suit their special

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted by permission of the *Modern Monthly*, issue of April, 1934.

purposes. From this monistic philosophy of history, there follows a uniform political practice and a uniform theory of revolutionary strategy and tactics. But where differences in historic background, national psychology, religious profession and practice are taken into account—and they must be considered in every scientific theory—there will be corresponding differences in political methods, differences that may extend to general policies as well as to the strategy of their execution. For example, so far as the historic experience of America is concerned, two things among many others are overlooked by official Communists whose philosophy has been projected on the basis of special European conditions. We in the United States have no background of a dominant and overshadowing feudalism. Our troubles flow from the oppressive exercise of power by financial overlords and from the failure to introduce new forms of *democratic* control in industry and government consonant with the shift from individual to corporate economy. It is a possibility overlooked by official Communists that important social changes in the direction of democratization of industry may be accomplished by groups working *with* the working class although, strictly speaking, *not of* them. The other point ignored by the Communists is our deeply rooted belief in the importance of individuality, a belief that is almost absent in the Oriental world from which Russia has drawn so much. Not to see that this attitude, so engrained in our habitual ways of thought and action, demands a very different set of policies and methods from those embodied in official Communism, verges to my mind on political insanity.

3. While I recognize the existence of class conflicts as one of the fundamental facts of social life today, I am profoundly skeptical of class war as *the* means by which such conflicts can be eliminated and genuine social advance made. And yet this is a basic point in Communist theory and is more and more identified with the meaning of dialectic materialism as applied to the social process. Historically speaking, it may have been necessary for Russia in order to achieve peace for her war-weary soldiers, and land for her hungry peasants, to convert incipient class war into open civil war culminating in the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat. But nonetheless Fascism in Germany and Italy cannot be understood except with reference to the lesson those countries learned from the U.S.S.R. How Communism can continue to advocate the kind of economic change it desires by means of civil war, armed insurrection and iron dictatorship in face of what has happened in Italy and Germany I cannot at all understand. Reliable observers have contended that the Communist ideology of dictatorship and violence together with the belief that the Communist Party was the foreign arm of a foreign power constituted one of the factors which aided the growth of Fascism in Germany. I am firmly convinced that imminent civil war, or even the overt threat of such a war, in any Western nation, will bring Fascism with its terrible engines of repression to power. Communism, then, with its doctrine of the necessity of the forcible overthrow of the state by armed insurrection, with its doctrine of the dictatorship of the proletariat, with its threats to exclude all other classes from civil rights to smash their political parties, and to deprive them of the

rights of freedom of speech, press and assembly—which Communists *now* claim for themselves under capitalism—Communism is itself an unwitting, but nonetheless powerful, factor in bringing about Fascism. As an unalterable opponent of Fascism in every form, I cannot be a Communist.

4. It is not irrelevant to add that one of the reasons I am not a Communist is that the emotional tone and methods of discussion and dispute which seems to accompany Communism at present are extremely repugnant to me. Fair play, elementary honesty in the representation of facts and especially of the opinions of others, are something more than “bourgeois virtues.” They are traits that have been won only after long struggle. They are not deep-seated in human nature even now—witness the methods that brought Hitlerism to power. The systematic, persistent and seemingly intentional disregard of these things by Communist spokesmen in speech and press, the hysteria of their denunciations, their attempts at character assassination of their opponents, their misrepresentation of the views of the “liberals” to whom they also appeal for aid in their defense campaigns, their policy of “rule or ruin” in their so-called united front activities, their apparent conviction that what they take to be the end justifies the use of *any* means if only those means promise to be successful—all these, in my judgment, are fatal to the very end which official Communists profess to have at heart. And if I read the temper of the American people aright, especially so in this country.

5. A revolution effected solely or chiefly by violence can in a modernized society like our own result only in chaos. Not only would civilization be destroyed but the things necessary for bare life. There are some, I am sure, now holding and preaching Communism who would be the first to react against it, if in this country Communism were much more than a weak protest or an avocation of literary men. Few Communists are really aware of the far-reaching implications of the doctrine that civil war is the *only* method by which revolutionary economic and political changes can be brought about. A comparatively simple social structure, such as that which Russia had, may be able to recover from the effects of violent, internal disturbance. And Russia, it must be remembered, had the weakest middle class of any major nation. Were a large scale revolution to break out in highly industrialized America, where the middle class is stronger, more militant and better prepared than anywhere else in the world, it would either be abortive, drowned in a blood bath, or if it were victorious, would win only a Pyrrhic victory. The two sides would destroy the country and each other. For this reason, too, I am not a Communist.

I have been considering the position, as I understand it, of the orthodox and official Communism. I cannot blind myself, however, to the perceptible difference between communism with a small *c*, and Communism, official Communism, spelt with a capital letter.

## WHY I AM NOT A COMMUNIST<sup>1</sup>

by MORRIS R. COHEN

LIKE many others who are not Communists, I hold no brief for the injustices and stupidities of the present capitalist régime. Indeed, I have never ceased to be grateful for the illumination on historic and contemporary social issues which I found in studying Marx's *Das Kapital*. It prepared me to see that the present general breakdown of capitalist economy is not an unforeseeable accident but a consequence of the private ownership of the machinery of production, whereby the processes of industry are directed for the profit of individual capitalists rather than for the satisfaction of our common needs. The old optimistic but essentially anarchistic notion that the good of all will best be promoted by "rugged" individualism, by each pursuing his own selfish economic gain, is a cruel superstition which no man possessed of both reason and a decent amount of human sympathy can maintain in the face of the hideous miseries of our present disorder. When good crops turn out to be calamitous to the farmers who toil to raise them, because the city workers cannot with their needed labor buy the cereals and cotton which they need for food and clothing, the bankruptcy of capitalism is as clear as anything in human affairs can be.

But while the foregoing or essentially similar criticism of the evils of capitalism is largely used by Communists, it is not peculiar to them. They share it not only with other Marxian socialists—whom, with self-defeating unfairness, they characterize as fascists and social-fascists—but also with many liberal social reformers. For Marx himself freely borrowed his ideas from bourgeois historians as well as from Saint-Simon, Fourier and their followers whom he, with the characteristic human failing of borrowers, belittled as Utopians. (Note, for instance, how closely the *Communist Manifesto* follows Victor Considerant's *Principe de Socialisme, Manifeste de la Démocratie*, etc., not only in ideas but also in their linguistic expression.) What distinguishes present-day Communists is not, therefore, their professed ultimate goal or their analysis of our economic ills, but their political remedy or program, to wit, the seizure of power by armed rebellion and the setting up of a dictatorship by the leaders of the Communist Party. To be sure, this dictatorship is to be in the name of the *proletariat*, just as the fascist dictatorship is in the name of *the whole nation*. But such verbal tricks cannot hide the brute facts of tyrannical suppression necessarily involved in all dictatorship. For the wielders of dictatorial power are few, seldom if ever themselves workingmen, and they can maintain their power only by ruthlessly suppressing all expression of popular dissatisfaction with their rule. And where there is no freedom of discussion, there is no freedom of thought.

This program of civil war, dictatorship, and the illiberal or fanatically intolerant spirit which war psychology always engenders, may bring more

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted by permission of the *Modern Monthly*, issue of April, 1934. Professor Cohen prefers the title *Why I am Not a Member of the Communist Party*.

miseries than those that the communists seek to remove; and the arguments to prove that such war is desirable or inevitable seem to me patently inadequate.

Communists ignore the historic truth that civil wars are much more destructive of all that men hold dearest than are wars between nations; and all the arguments which they use against the latter, including the late "war to end war," are much more cogent against civil wars. Wars between nations are necessarily restricted in scope and do not prevent—to a limited extent they even stimulate—coöperation without a community. But civil wars necessarily dislocate all existing social organs and leave us with little social capital or machinery to rebuild a better society. The hatred which fratricidal wars develop are more persistent and destructive than those developed by wars that terminate in treaties or agreements.

Having lived under the tyranny of the Czar, I cannot and do not condemn all revolutions. But the success and benefits of any revolution depend on the extent to which, like the American Revolution of 1776, the French Revolution 1789, and the anti-Czarist Revolution of March, 1917, it approximates national unanimity in the coöperation of diverse classes. When armed uprisings have been undertaken by single oppressed classes, such as the revolt of the gladiators in Rome, the various peasant revolts in England, Germany and Russia, the French Commune of 1871, or the Moscow uprising of 1905, they have left a deplorably monotonous record of bloody massacres and oppressive reaction. The idea that armed rebellion is the only, or always effective, cure for social ills seems to me no better than the old superstition of medieval medicine, that blood-letting is the only and the sovereign remedy for all bodily ills.

Communists may feel that the benefits of their Revolution of 1917 outweigh all the terrific hardships which the Russian people have suffered since then. But reasonable people in America will do well to demand better evidence than has yet been offered that they can improve their lot by blindly imitating Russia. Russian breadlines, and famine without breadlines, are certainly not *prima facie* improvements over American conditions. At best a revolution is a regrettable means to bring about greater human welfare. It always unleashes the forces that thrive in disorder, the brutal executions, imprisonments and, what is even worse, the sordid spying that undermines all feeling of personal security. These forces, once let loose, are difficult to control and they tend to perpetuate themselves. If, therefore, human well-being, rather than mere destruction, is our aim, we must be as critically minded in considering the consequences of armed revolution as in considering the evils of the existing régime.

One of the reasons that leads communists to ignore the terrific destruction which armed rebellion must bring about is the conviction that "the revolution" is inevitable. In this they follow Marx, who, dominated by the Hegelian dialectic, regarded the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie as inevitable,<sup>1</sup> so that all that human effort can hope to achieve is "to shorten and lessen the birth pangs" of the new order.<sup>2</sup> There is, however, very little scientific value in this dialectic argument, and many com-

<sup>1</sup> *Capital*, I, p. 837.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-15.

munists are quite ready to soft-pedal it and admit that some human mistake or misstep might lead to the triumph of fascism. The truth is that the dialectic method which Marx inherited from Hegel and Schelling is an outgrowth of speculations carried on in theologic seminaries. The "system" of production takes the place of the councils or the mills of the gods. Such Oriental fatalism has little support in the spirit and method of modern science. Let us therefore leave the pretended dialectic proof and examine the contention on an historic basis.

Historically, the argument is put thus: When did any class give up its power without a bloody struggle? As in most rhetorical questions, the questioner does not stop for an answer, assuming that his ignorance is conclusive as to the facts. Now, it is not difficult to give instances of ruling classes giving up their sovereignty without armed resistance. The English landed aristocracy did it in the Reform Bill of 1832; and the Russian nobility did it in 1863 when they freed their serfs, though history showed clearly that in this way not only their political power but their very existence was doomed (for money income has never been as secure as direct revenue from the land, and life in cities reduced the absolute number of noble families). In our own country, the old seaboard aristocracy, which put over the United States Constitution and controlled the government up to the Jacksonian era, offered no armed resistance when the backwoods farmers outvoted them and removed church and property qualifications for office and for the franchise.

But it is not necessary to multiply such instances. It is more important to observe that history does not show that any *class* ever gained its enfranchisement through a bloody rebellion carried out by its own unaided efforts. When ruling classes are overthrown it is by a combination of groups that have risen to power only after a long process. For the parties to a rebellion cannot succeed unless they have more resources than the established régime. Thus the ascendancy of the French bourgeoisie was aided by the royal power which Richelieu and Colbert used in the seventeenth century to transform the landed barons into dependent courtiers. Even so, the French Revolution of 1789 would have been impossible without the coöperation of the peasantry, whose opposition to their ancient seigneurs was strengthened as the latter ceased to be independent rulers of the land. This is in a measure also true of the supposedly purely Communist Revolution in Russia. For in that revolution, too, the peasantry had a much greater share than is ordinarily assumed. After all, the amount of landed communal property (that of the crown, the church, etc.) which was changed by the peasants into individual ownership was greater than the amount of private property made communal by the Soviet régime. The success of the Russian Revolution was largely due to the landlords' agents who, in their endeavor to restore the rule of the landlords, threw the peasantry into the arms of the Bolsheviks. To this day the Communist régime dare not declare openly in favor of nationalizing the land. Their system of coöperatives is frankly an attempt—and I do not believe it will be a successful attempt—to evade the peasants' unalterable opposition to communism so far as their own property is concerned. Indeed, the strictly



Marxian economics, with its ideology of surplus-value due to the ownership of the means of production, is inherently inapplicable to the case of the peasant who cultivates his own piece of ground.

Even more important, however, is it to note that no amount of repetition can make a truth of the dogma that the capitalist class alone rules this country and like the Almighty can do what it pleases. It would be folly to deny that as individuals or as a class they have more than their proportionate share of influence in the government, and that they have exercised it unintelligently and with dire results. But it is equally absurd to maintain that they have governed or can govern without the coöperation of the farmers and the influential middle classes. None of our recent constitutional amendments, not the income tax amendment, not the popular election of the United States Senators, not woman suffrage, neither prohibition nor its repeal, nor any other major bit of legislation can be said to have been imposed on our country in the interests of the capitalist class. The farmers, who despite mortgages still cling to the private ownership of their land, are actually the dominant political group even in industrial states like New York, Pennsylvania and Illinois.

The Communist division of mankind into workingmen and capitalists, suffer from the fallacy of simplism. Our social structure and effective class divisions are much more complicated. As the productivity of machinery increases, the middle classes increase rather than decrease. Hence a program based entirely on the supposed exclusive interests of the proletariat has no reasonable prospect. Any real threat of an armed uprising will only strengthen the reactionaries who are not less intelligent than the Communist leaders, understand just as well how to reach and influence our people, and have more ample means for organization. If our working classes find it difficult to learn what are their true interests and do not know how to control their representatives in the government and in the trade unions, there is little prospect that they will be able to control things better during a rebellion or during the ensuing dictatorship.

If the history of the past is any guide at all, it is that real improvements in the future will come like the improvements of the past, namely, through coöperation between different groups, each of which is wise enough to see the necessity of compromising with those with whom we have to live together and whom we cannot or do not wish to exterminate.

I know that this notion of compromise or of taking counsel as the least wasteful way of adjusting differences is regarded as hopelessly antiquated and bourgeois, but I do not believe that the ideas of so-called utopian socialists have really been refuted by those who arrogate the epithet scientific to themselves. The communists seem to me to be much more utopian and quite unscientific in their claims that the working class alone can by its own efforts completely transform our social order.

I do not have very high expectations from the efforts of sentimental benevolents. Yet, I cannot help noticing that the leaders of the communists and of other revolutionary labor movements—Engels, Marx, Lassalle, Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Lenin and Trotsky—have not been drawn to it by economic solidarity. They were not workingmen nor even all of working-

men's families. They were driven to their rôle by human sympathy. Sympathy with the sufferings of our fellow men is a human motive which cannot be read out of history. It has exerted tremendous social pressure. Without it you cannot explain the course of nineteenth century factory legislation, the freeing of serfs and slaves or the elimination of the grosser forms of human exploitation. Though some who regard themselves as followers of Karl Marx are constantly denouncing reformers who believe in piecemeal improvement and hope rather that things will get worse so as to drive people into a revolution, Marx himself did not always take that view. Very wisely he attached great importance to English factory legislation which restricted the number of hours per working day. For he realized that every little bit that strengthens the working class strengthens their resistance to exploitation. Those who are most oppressed and depressed, the inhabitants of the slums, do not revolt—they have not energy enough to think of it. When, therefore, Mr. Strachey and others criticize the socialists for not bringing about the millennium when they get into power, I am not at all impressed. I do not believe that the socialists or the Labor Party in England have been free from shameful error. But neither have the communists, nor any other human group been free from it. Trite as it sounds, it is nevertheless true that no human arrangement can bring about perfection on earth. And while to cherish such illusions is often a great consolation, it is a pity when it is used as a means to shut the gates of mercy. Real as are our human conflicts, our fundamental identity of interest in the face of hostile nature, seem to me worthy of more serious attention than the communists have been willing to accord it.

If liberalism were dead, I should still maintain that it deserved to live, that it was not condemned in the court of human reason, but lynched outside of it by the passionate and uncompromisingly ruthless war spirit, common to communists and fascists. But I do not believe that liberalism is dead, even though it is under eclipse. There still seems to me enough reason left to which to appeal against reckless fanaticism.

It is pure fanaticism to belittle the gains which have come to mankind from the spirit of free inquiry, free discussion, and accommodation. No human individual or group of individuals can claim omniscience. Hence, society can only suffer serious loss when one group suppresses the opinions and criticisms of all others. In purely abstract question compromise may often be a sign of confusion. One cannot really believe inconsistent principles at the same time. But in the absence of perfect or even adequate knowledge in regard to human affairs and their future, we must adopt an experimental attitude and treat principles not as eternal dogmas, but as hypotheses, to be tried to the extent that they indicate the general direction of solution to specific issues. But as the scientist must be ever ready to modify his own hypothesis or to recognize wherein a contrary hypothesis has merits or deserves preference, so, in practical affairs we must be prepared to learn from those who differ from us, and to recognize that however contradictory diverse views may appear in discourse they may not be so in their practical applications. Thus, the principles of communism and individualism may be held like theologic dogmas, eternally true and on no

occasion is the one to be contaminated with the other. But in fact, when communists get into power they do not differ so much from others. No one ever wished to make everything communal property. Nor does anyone in his senses believe that any individual will ever with impunity be permitted to use his "property" in an anti-social way when the rest of the community is aroused thereby. In actual life, the question as to how far communism shall be pushed, depends more upon specific analyses of actual situations, that is, upon factual knowledge. There can be no doubt that individualism à la Herbert Hoover has led millions to destruction. Nevertheless, we must not forget that a communist régime will, after all, be run by individuals who will exercise a tremendous amount of power, no less than do our captains of industry or finance today. There is no real advantage in assuming that under communism the laboring classes will be omniscient. We know perfectly well how labor leaders like John Lewis keep their power by bureaucratic rather than democratic methods. May it not be that the Stalins also keep their power by bureaucratic rather than democratic methods?

The communist criticism of liberalism seems to me altogether baseless and worthless. One would suppose from it that liberalism is a peculiar excrescence of capitalism. This is, however, not true. The essence of liberalism, freedom of thought and inquiry, freedom of discussion and criticism, is not the invention of the capitalist system. It is rather the mother of Greek and modern science without which our present industrial order, and the labor movement would be impossible. The plea that the denial of freedom is a temporary necessity is one advanced by all militarists. It ignores the fact that when suppression becomes a habit, it is not readily abandoned. Thus, when the Christian church after its alliance with the Roman Empire began the policy of "compelling them to enter," it kept up the habit of intolerant persecution for many centuries. Those who believe that many of the finer fruits of civilization were choked thereby should be careful about strengthening the forces of intolerance.

When the communists tell me that I must choose between their dictatorship and fascism I feel that I am offered the choice between being shot or being hanged. It would be suicide for liberal civilization to accept this as exhausting the field of human possibility. I prefer to hope that the present wave of irrationalism and of fanatical intolerance will recede and that the great human energy which manifests itself in free thought will not perish. Often before it has emerged after being swamped by passionate superstitions. There is no reason to feel that it may not do so again.

# COMMUNISM WITHOUT DOGMAS<sup>1</sup>

## *A Reply*

by SIDNEY HOOK

### I

TO BEGIN with I wish to make it perfectly clear that if by communism one means an acceptance of the present principles and tactics of the Third International, or any of its affiliated organizations, I am not a communist. But to define communism in terms of membership in a specific organization is as inadequate as to define Christianity in terms of membership in any particular church. I believe that communist principles are more important than communist organizations, for they enable us to judge the theory and practice of existing communist organizations in their light. It is these principles I wish to make the basis of discussion—principles to be found in the writings of Marx and Engels, and in the economic and political works of Lenin and Trotsky. Here, again, some further distinctions are necessary. If by communism one means a form of social organization in which the associated producers democratically control the production and distribution of goods, then it is possible to be a communist without being a Marxist, although every Marxist must be a communist. Marxism, then, can only be significantly defined as the theory and practice of achieving communism or a classless society. When I speak of *Marxian* communism, again I do not mean the communism preached and practiced today by “official” and “orthodox” communist parties in Europe and America. In fact, it seems to me that just as Marx and Engels in 1848 called themselves communists to set themselves off from bourgeois socialists who had debased the term socialism, so it may soon become necessary to find another name for communism to differentiate it from the Communist Party which has succeeded in corrupting the meaning of the term by its mistaken theories and tragically sectarian tactics.

I shall indicate the grounds upon which I accept Marxian communism and shall try to show that any other type of communism is doomed to remain an unrealizable dream. In the sense in which I have defined these terms Bertrand Russell, John Dewey and Morris R. Cohen may, on the basis of their social writings, be regarded as communists of a sort, since they all subscribe to the ideal of a classless society. But they are clearly not Marxists.

It is a commonplace, however, of Marxist methodology—and indeed of experimental logic—that it is impossible to make a sharp division between means and ends; that the real meaning of any goal can be understood only in relation to the means necessary to attain it; and that intelligent choice of ends can be made only when the consequences of the use of our means have been taken into calculation. What we really want is not merely what we say we want but what the doing, which is always bound up with sin-

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted by permission of the *Modern Monthly*, issue of April, 1934.

cere saying, commits us to. From this point of view, when two parties say they want the same thing but disagree concerning the methods by which it may be attained, analysis will show that they do not really want the same thing. It is important to stress this because verbally all social classes and political parties profess to subscribe to the same ideals—security, order, happiness, peace or whatnot. Thirty years ago it was possible for a leading statesman to say: “We are all socialists now.” Tomorrow another one of his kind will say: “We are all collectivists now.” Both “socialism” and “collectivism,” in the abstract, function like the formulæ proposed by the League of Nations and accepted by nations with conflicting interests. They conceal differences instead of expressing them. That is why it is possible for ministers to sign peace pacts with one hand and war budgets with another, and why statesmen who are self-declared socialists imprison those who are trying to bring socialism about. Unless in every definite socio-historical situation the ideal formulæ are given specific content in terms of a program of action, it is impossible to take them seriously except as disguises of another kind of allegiance—one of which the proponents of the ideal formulæ may be truly unconscious but which is unmistakably revealed in what they actively support or passively tolerate in practice. In a deeper sense, then, instead of Marxian communism being one species of communism sharing a great deal in common with other species but differing in a few important details, it may turn out that its differences from other types of communism are far more important than its agreements. This I believe to be the case.

I shall now proceed to state the general arguments for communism in such a way that the organic connection between communism as a philosophy of social organization and Marxism as the theory and practice of social revolution may be more apparent than appears in customary exposition. I shall attempt to meet the major arguments of Bertrand Russell, John Dewey and Morris R. Cohen against communism, at the same time pointing out what in the principles and practice of orthodox Communist Parties today give the criticisms of these eminent men such force and apparent plausibility.

### 1. *The Argument from Efficiency*

The strongest justification ever offered for capitalism was its success in unlocking the great sources of energy which slumbered in nature and society. The classic tribute which Marx paid in the *Communist Manifesto* to the great historic function of capitalism in developing the forces of production and creating the conditions of modern civilized life is all the more significant because it came from one who was passionately aware of the human costs of the accumulation of capital, of the industrial and bourgeois revolutions. To all arguments against capitalism on humanitarian grounds the unflinching reponse came: “It works.” Today no honest man in his senses can make a similar reply. Capitalism cannot even attempt to operate its production plants at full capacity without coming to a standstill almost overnight. Its further functioning is possible only by the retrenchment and destruction of already existing facilities. The signs of this appear on all sides—in fact, it has been elevated to a deliberate policy under

the euphemism of "social planning." During the nineteenth century, economic waste might have been regarded as a by-product of necessary economic advance; today, it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that industry and agriculture can continue to function only as by-products of necessary economic waste. From the point of view of its productive efficiency not even the most brazen apologists of capitalists can say a word for it.

It is not only from the standpoint of the industrial engineer that capitalism appears to be wasteful and destructive; its waste of human resources—which is a necessary consequence of its economic policies—is just as irresponsible and even more criminal. Hand in hand with its tendency towards industrial consolidation and capital concentration, it slowly but surely destroys the lives of the great producing masses. And this even without recourse to the "extraordinary" processes of war. Progressive unemployment on the one side and progressive speed-up for the employed on the other, together with the demoralizing effect of insecurity on the mind, character and life of almost the entire nation, produce a mass of misery not less terrible for being long drawn out or expressed in the monotonous rhythms of stupefaction, anxiety and despair.

So much all socialists and communists must—and do—grant. Why, then, labor the point, especially since the other contributors to the symposium admit it and have written with great eloquence about the manifold evils of capitalism? Because in evaluating the communist position, it is precisely these factors which they have omitted from consideration. The risks of revolutionary action are regarded without weighing the price of the alternative paths of action, whether these be the passive endurance of existing evils or the methods of evolutionary or parliamentary socialism. It is the absence of a realistic alternative program and path of action which makes the criticism of the communist position—justified as it may appear to be from an abstract ideal position—irrelevant to the pressing tasks of combating capitalism, fascism and war.

## 2. *The Argument from Democracy*

Whatever may be the claims of capitalism to democratic forms of political representation, there can be no denying the fact that the existence of economic class divisions in society makes genuine democracy impossible. The power which the control of the means of production gives the ruling class over those who must live by their use, extends to every phase of social and personal life. Communism, despite the false emphasis of some of its adherents, is not the negation of democracy but its fulfillment. The right to determine our own social destiny—to go to heaven or to hell in our own way—is an intrinsic good. It may be that in industrial society most administrative tasks demand specialized knowledge and selection on the basis of merit rather than election by popular favor. But in any society there can be, from the communist point of view, no specialist in social policy. Those who wear the shoe know best where it pinches. Unless provision is made at some point for the democratic control and check of social policy, mankind may be well-fed, it cannot be free.

The way to get genuine democracy—social democracy—is to take power and overthrow the economic system which makes the ruling class within it,

together with its representatives, dictators of the national economy. When communists speak of taking power, they do not mean that a minority of the population is to seize control and hold it against the desire of the majority of the population. The theory of dictatorship of the proletariat, in its classic not degenerate form, presupposes that a majority of the population supports the working class and its political allies. The opposite of the dictatorship of the proletariat is not democracy but the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. A good English synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat is a workers' democracy.

The real question is, then, how a workers' democracy is to be achieved. All of the three distinguished contributors to this symposium believe that the policy of class collaboration will enable the masses to acquire social security, democracy and peace. But this flies in the face of the actual historic experience of the last fifty years. It presupposes that under the existing economic set-up it is possible both to increase the standard of living of the masses and to sustain the rate of profit and interest. It overlooks the thousandfold objective antagonisms which exist between the capitalists of the entire world and the international working class. It shuts its eyes to the fact that every concession which has been won from those in power has been forced by mass struggles and the threat of further struggles. It refuses to reflect upon the history, activity and fate of the Social-Democratic Party in Germany and the Labor Party in England—parties which became the instrumentalities by which the dictatorship of finance capital lowered the standards of living, strengthened the national defense, continued the old shell game of diplomacy in foreign affairs and restricted, in the interests of national unity, militant working-class agitation.

To profess a love for democracy in the abstract and not to be willing to fight to give it concrete content, to take the rules of political democracy in a profit society—rules which are so flexible that they enable a Mussolini and a Hitler to come to power—as the *fixed* limits within which to struggle for a truly human society, is to give a lease in perpetuity to the capitalist dictatorship upon the lives of the people. According to the communist theory, political democratic forms are to be used for agitational purposes to the uttermost. But when the time comes when the capitalist dictatorship has plunged the country into chaos, when production has been disorganized, when hunger and despair eat out men's bodies and souls, when the great masses of people led by those who have social vision are already in action to protect themselves and to secure the future of their descendants, it is nothing short of calamitous to make a fetish of legality. The rising bourgeoisie never hesitated to set up its own revolutionary legality against the legal anathemas of an earlier dying social order. How much more justification has the working class, together with its allies—the farmers, the technicians, the professional groups—to do so. For it does not take power to visit vengeance upon anyone or to exploit another class but to abolish all economic classes. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that communists do not believe in a minority revolution. Nor do they believe in a revolution at any time or under any circumstances. Nor would they dream of urging the masses to make an open bid for power unless the general discontent with capitalist rule had penetrated every important group in the country

including the armed forces which now stand ready to be hurled against them whenever their agitation threatens to be effective. *It is the consequences of the existing capitalist dictatorship which makes people revolutionary: the task of the communists is to educate them to proper class consciousness and to lead them.*

I stress these things because the other contributors to this discussion have misinterpreted the communist theory. *They do not distinguish* between a *putsch* or *coup d'état* and a social revolution. *They attribute* to communists the absurd belief that the working class by its own unaided power can achieve victory. *They impute* to communists the fantastic notion that every measure of social amelioration from the abolition of child labor to an unemployment insurance bill must be won by social revolution. Whatever occasion members of the official communist party may have given them to believe this, there is nothing in the theory of communism to justify it. When communists ask: "When has any ruling class voluntarily surrendered its power?" Professor Cohen offers to tell them. But his illustrations show that he is unaware that the question refers to periods in which the important issue concerned the overt change in property relationships and not measures of reform. *The bourgeois revolution took place in England in the Cromwellian wars and not in the period from 1832 to 1884.* *The bourgeois revolution took place in France in 1789-1793 and not with the fall of the Third Empire.* Even the English reform bills were yielded by the Tories only because of their fear of a revolution induced by the semi-insurrectionary demonstrations of the English working class. The strength of the revolutionary movement was indicated not only by the flaming portents of burning hayricks, clashes with the constabulary and seditious slogans but by the frightened alacrity with which the English middle classes deserted their working-class allies. The liberation of the serfs by Alexander II was a move to consolidate his own rule which had been undermined by the reverses in the Crimean War and subsequent revolutionary ferment. The terms of the liberation were such that the power of the Russian landlords was not diminished nor the lot of the serf improved; only the development of capitalism was made easier. *The real bourgeois revolution in Russia took place in February, 1917.* It would be no exaggeration to say that most of the significant reforms granted by ruling classes in history have either been measures taken to strengthen themselves against eventual attack or have been forced from them by the fear of having to surrender more to revolutionary forces.

*Those who have power are not afraid of the liberals but of the actual or potential revolutionary forces behind them. Liberalism becomes a political power only when it can point to the danger of something "still worse" in the offing.*

Let us admit, however, for the sake of the argument, that some ruling classes in the past have peacefully abdicated their power. And certainly both Marx (in 1872) and Engels (in 1886) believed that a peaceful revolution was possible in England and America. Does that mean that the working class must cultivate the faith that when a revolutionary situation arises the state will act any differently than it now does in strikes, evictions and mass protests? Consider what is at stake. Socialization of the means of produc-



tion does not mean the substitution of one class for another in the ownership of private property; it means the abolition of all private property of a social nature. In past revolutions it was possible for members of one class to save their property by shifting their class allegiance. And by the time the bourgeois revolution broke out the interests of the entrepreneurs, the landlords and the monarchy interlocked at many points. Yet how bitterly the feudal classes fought against the rising bourgeoisie who were often more than ready to compromise. Is it romanticism or merely sober wisdom to expect that the ruling classes today will fight even more fiercely against any proposal which makes forever impossible the arbitrary exercise of power over human beings through the possession of private property? Is it far-fetched to imagine that once a workers' democracy were set up, even peacefully and legally, that almost overnight a counter-revolutionary Defense Guard would spring into existence to defend "home, country and honor"? The Finnish Socialists who had a majority in the parliament of 1918 were swept out of power by a bloody counter-revolution. Communists demand—I had almost written common sense demands—that the working class be ready to defend itself when a revolutionary situation arises. And an effective defense cannot be conducted—as the Austrian Social-Democracy learned—by waiting until the enemy has made its position impregnable by disarming and surrounding the workers. At certain times successful defense is only possible by strategic offense. Communists do not create civil war: they merely fight to a finish the civil war which in one form of the class struggle or another is always going on.

The argument may be summarized as follows: Objections against the use of force as always intrinsically wrong cannot be consistently made except by those who make a fetish or religion of non-resistance. But whoever supports any state and pays the taxes which subsidize the military and police arm of the state, is barred from using the plea of non-resistance. If the use of force is justified only when it has the sanction of legality—which seems to be the position which the other contributors take—then it can be pointed out that those who have the legal power can always change the forms and meaning of "legality." The consequence would be a necessary acceptance of any régime so long as it abided by its own shifting forms of legality. When it is realized that the social revolution is not a minority revolution, the use of force does not constitute a special moral problem but a problem in effective and intelligent application. Renan was undoubtedly justified in saying: "*Happy are those who inherit a revolution: woe to those who make it.*" A Marxist might reply that a social revolution is one way of repaying the debt we owe for reaping the advantages of past revolutions. But his real answer would be to show (see point 5 below) that under capitalism it is even truer to say: *And greater woe to those who do not make it.*

### 3. *The Argument from Morality*

It is commonly assumed by a great many exponents as well as critics of Marxism that there is no place in Marx's critique of bourgeois civilization for a moral evaluation of the social order. This is an error. Marx denied the relevance of any abstract morality which merely juggles with formal concepts, to the conflict of class interests at the basis of social life. But each

class interest generates its own morality. To deny this is to deny that history is made by men. In almost every one of his works Marx scathingly criticizes the dominant morality of society and indicates the general character of the morality which should replace it. In the *Communist Manifesto* he points out how almost every value of life—love, marriage, art, science and vocational activity—has been clouded over and degraded by the “morality of cash-payment.” Against the ideals of a social order in which the possession of property gives power over others and hampers their free development, he counterposes the ideal of a society “in which the free development of each individual is the condition for the free development of all.”

Marx was impatient with the easy equalitarianism which sought to minimize individual differences and reduce personalities to a symmetric democracy of ciphers. Certain human differences in capacity, vision and creation may be irresolvable: but Marx held that these differences cannot be exploited, by those upon whom nature has lavished them, to the cost of the rest of the community, which supplies the opportunity for their expression. Human talents which draw their nutriment from social life must be put to the service of the whole. But the only social condition under which this is possible, under which the possessive and exclusive tendencies of men can be channeled into creative and shared activities, is a classless society. Do we hold “intelligence and free experimental inquiry” in all fields to be genuine goods? Then the existing social order which makes it impossible to apply intelligence to human problems, which calls for a moratorium on technical ingenuity, which employs myth, magic, chicanery and force to mediate human conflicts, must first be fundamentally transformed. Substitute for “intelligence” any other value in the previous question and it will be seen that its concrete realization presupposes an anterior change in the material institutions of social life.

Professor Cohen declares the communist criticism of liberalism to be altogether baseless and worthless. But he defines the essence of liberalism to be freedom of thought and inquiry, freedom of discussion and criticism. Now communism, as I understand it, would not dream of denying the value of liberalism in this sense. It points out, however, that in a profit society inequality of economic status makes it impossible for all classes to enjoy this freedom, that just as soon as the freedom of discussion and criticism begins to bear fruit disapproved by those who have a monopoly of political power, it is abridged and finally revoked. Genuine liberalism in the sense in which Professor Cohen defines it, is possible in *all fields* only when vested interests have been abolished. Some restraints may always be necessary but they should flow not from extrinsic considerations, such as those derived from economics and politics, but from the necessities of fair and free discussion itself. As a matter of fact, however, by “liberalism” communism understands something quite different from what Professor Cohen intends. Liberalism is the social philosophy of *laissez-faire*. The only connection between liberalism, as the theory and practice of bourgeois society, and liberalism, as free inquiry, is that the first, in the interests of the needs of its own expanding economy, made possible the wider extension of free inquiry than any previous social system. But as fascism shows,

in the period of the decline of capitalism when the falling profit rate and interest rate compel rationalization and coördination not only in industry but in politics as well, free inquiry is scrapped together with all other obsolescent economic and governmental machinery. It is legitimate, however, to challenge Professor Cohen's right to define liberalism in the way he has. It is just as if someone, after having described Professor Cohen's opposition to radicalism, were to go on to define radicalism as "an attitude which went to the root of problems." Communism is no more opposed to liberalism in Professor Cohen's sense than he is opposed to radicalism in this last sense.

But how reconcile this belief with the well-known position of the communists that a transitional period must intervene between the capitalist dictatorship and the classless society in which illiberal methods must be used against those who obstruct the processes of building the conditions under which liberalism (in Professor Cohen's sense) is possible, in which force must be used against those who will not keep the peace? Is there not a contradiction here? Not if we first ask ourselves how else peace and the widest degree of free inquiry can be achieved. The notion that all matters can be settled by free discussion today presupposes that it is possible for both sides to engage in it, that they are willing to do so, that they are pledged to abide by the consequences of the discussion, and that the fundamental class conflicts over the distribution of the social product and social power can be affected by such discussion. The lessons of Italy and Germany must still be learned by the spokesmen of liberalism. During the transitional period the denial of liberties is directed, in theory at any rate, only against those whose activities are such as would restore the old order and thereby destroy the new freedom and liberties which the social revolution has won. The restrictions last so long as the class enemy exists, and only against the enemy on relevant political matters. But, objects Professor Cohen, this is just what the militarists say; for them, too, the suppression of civil liberties is temporary. Certainly they say it. But the real question is whether the militaristic wars aim to remove the sources and causes of future wars and, therefore, the evils which flow from war including the denial of civil liberty. If they did, I, for one, would not be opposed to them. But no militarist or imperialist war can do this or even aim to do this. That is why we do not put any stock in what the militarists of the world say. However, that there are greater difficulties and dangers involved in the conception of a transitional period than most communists realize, I shall point out below in my discussion of the "dogmas" of orthodox communism (Section II, Part 3).

In this connection it cannot be too strongly emphasized that communism does not believe that the end justifies the use of any means. If some communists talk that way, they are simply mad and belong in the fascist camp. For it is precisely in their refusal to employ any means to win a victory that the political strategy of communism distinguishes itself, among other things, from the tactics of fascism. Communists would not martyrize an entire people as the fascists have done, they would not countenance wholesale massacres of innocent victims, they would not pound and torture women and children in order to achieve power. The use of means to attain

an end, which have as their consequences the violation of still more important ends, is forbidden not only by elementary decency but by considerations of expediency. To win the confidence of the working class and its potential allies, communists must be the living exemplifications in both person and practice of the highest ideals—the most important of which are courage, intelligence and honesty. The fact that the official communist parties in the Western world despite their desperate heroism have fallen far short of the ideals of communist behavior is only a measure of the extent to which they have abandoned the true communist position in this as in other matters of principle. It is not an argument against communism. I admit with shame that I have no answer to Professor Dewey's charges against the official communist party practice of deceit, misrepresentation, disruptive hooliganism, character assassination and downright lying about those who have honest differences with them. This is especially true of their attitudes to those other communist groups which do not believe that a political party is a church and that its leadership is infallible. I know from personal experience the infinite capacity of the official communist press to invent, distort and slander—in short, to drag the name of communism down to the level of the bourgeois gutter press. But this is no part of the philosophy of communism, no communist party ever came to power by such practices, and the emergence of a mass revolutionary movement will sweep into the discard all who engage in such practices.

#### 4. *The Argument from Art*

No matter how bad a social system is, it can never completely choke the creative impulses of man. But by providing a hostile or indifferent milieu, or by establishing social mechanisms which select both the artists and the type of art to be encouraged, a social system exercises enormous influence upon the character of existing art, the extent to which, and the classes among which it flourishes, and the functional rôle it plays in the processes of daily life. Under capitalism the professional artist without means can survive only by producing for a market or by receiving a subsidy from a patron. Where he produces for a market, his work is likely to reflect the cheap commercial values of a profit economy. When he produces for the select market of museums and private collectors, the shrinkage in the returns on capital investment, the vicissitudes of the business cycle and the radical retrenchment on "cultural luxuries" which marks the decline of capitalism, progressively narrows his opportunities to dispose of his products. At the present time, except for a very few, most of them dead, this market has dried up. Dependence upon the capricious generosity of patrons, who in the best of times are hard to find, strikes at the very heart of a free creative art, and, what is more important, at the self-respect of the artist as a human being.

In a communist society, social control of the processes of production will enable us to break down the false separation between æsthetic significance and utility, between artificial museum art and the natural life of the people. When production is planned for beauty as well as for use, artists can be drawn into the productive processes in a way which is impossible in a profit society. This does not mean that all art will necessarily have a utilitarian

or functional aspect any more than all science will. But in art as in other fields, communism will provide greater opportunities for all those who are especially endowed with creative talent than any other social system of the past. That there will be abuses, goes without saying. It is not undue optimism, however, once the social instrumentalities for planned production and democratic mass education are at hand, to expect that the æsthetic blasphemies and the waste of human talent, as we know them today, will be eliminated.

### 5. *The Argument from Necessity*

At no time in recent history has there been such alarming unanimity that the world is drifting towards war and fascism. And fascism, it must be remembered, is not a new social system but capitalism, *gleichgeschaltet* and armed to the teeth, compelled by the logic of a super-rationalized profit system and a frenzied religion of nationalism, to prepare for bigger and better wars. Russell, Dewey and Cohen admit this as well as the fact that a social revolution is a possible alternative. They deny, however, that social revolution is a desirable alternative and that fascism and communism exhaust all of the possible alternatives. They do not indicate, however, what the third alternative can be; nor can I infer from their words what differentiating social character they conceive this alternative to have, nor, further, what the methods of achieving it will be. I wish to argue, however, that no matter what alternative is imagined, the existing situation in the world today, which must always be the point of departure for realistic analysis, narrows "the vital option" mankind can exercise, to a choice between war and social revolution.

Before this can be done it is necessary to meet an important objection which Professor Dewey has raised. As a sincere opponent of fascism, he holds that he must oppose any revolutionary radical movement because the growth of such a movement will almost certainly unleash the forces of fascist reaction and counter-revolution. There is a semblance of plausibility about this argument, for it cannot be denied that the growth of revolutionary sentiment will accelerate the rate with which forces will be rallied to the defense of the existing order. Offhand one might respond that this danger makes it imperative to prepare even more widely and intensively. Certainly I know that this would be Professor Dewey's answer if one were to tell him that agitation against lynching was adding fuel to the fire of southern Negro prejudice. But there is a more fundamental assumption behind Professor Dewey's question which must be challenged, viz., that fascism is a superficial political form imposed upon the social processes of existing production and not a natural outgrowth of the latent tendencies of imperialist, finance capital. Psychologically, fascism is a reaction against the consequences of capitalist production; objectively and practically, it consolidates capitalist rule and dictatorship. Where there are strong labor organizations fascism must of course destroy them. But the social necessity of fascism is not explained merely by the *existence* of labor organizations but by the needs of capitalist economy which calls for the transformation of the "rationalized" state into a direct arm of the "rationalized" national

plant. Even if all the opponents of fascism were to become followers of Gandhi overnight and forswear all active resistance, this would not check the fascization of the capitalist state, the germs of which are already in the N R A. I do not mean to imply, as some official communists do, that the existing state under Roosevelt is in essentials fascist, a view which follows *a fortiori* from the still wider notion that, in the words of Stalin, "social-democracy and Hitler are twins"(!). What I am asserting is that fascism will have to be fought or have to be accepted. And if it is to be fought, what other way is more effective than the development of a mass revolutionary movement under intelligent and militant leadership? Would Professor Dewey suggest the way of German Social-Democracy which went down without even a struggle, or the way of Austrian Social-Democracy which waited until it was too late, and whose leaders argued from the same premises which he accepts? If so, historical events have spoken and the premises should be judged by their consequences.

In the modern world the ideals of national economic self-sufficiency or autarchy are unworkable. Few nations possess all the raw materials necessary for developed culture, and even if they did the fact that the gap between mass production and mass consumption cannot be closed in a profit system compels them to seek foreign outlets, spheres of influence and methods of breaking down their neighbors' economic isolation. Under these circumstances war is the only "economic" way out for the ruling classes since it destroys surplus stocks of goods and men and carries with it the promise of the reestablishment of the domestic and foreign market. Despite the pious sentiments of peace professed on all sides, the world today, both physically and psychically, has a higher potential capacity for war than at any other time in history. *When war comes—!* Everyone knows the answer. There is no longer any difference between the front and the rear, between combatants and non-combatants. I could quote eloquent passages from the writings of Russell and Dewey to prove that the next world war spells the end of civilization. The real question is what is to be done to prevent it, and how is it to be stopped once it begins. Whatever the costs of a social revolution may be, they will be far less than the costs of the major war into which the world is drifting. And whatever the chances of its success, it at least holds forth the promise of a new order in which war and the other barbarities of capitalism will be unthinkable.

With all respect to the arguments of Messrs. Russell,<sup>1</sup> Dewey and Cohen, it seems to me that they have not established a case against the communist philosophy but against the official Communist Party. But even here the only valid criticism of the Communist Party is that it is not communist

<sup>1</sup> I have not considered the arguments of Bertrand Russell against the Marxian economic analysis because their brevity has prevented me from understanding them. They seem to imply, however, that Marx held to the "subsistence theory" of wages which Marx specifically repudiated. At certain times the redistribution of surplus-value depends *in part* upon the workers' own efforts in organizing themselves and fighting for higher wages and shorter hours. One of the uses of political mass agitation is to compel the bourgeoisie to return part of the surplus-value in the form of social services. This does not imply, however, the possibility of the permanent improvement of the working class under capitalism.

enough, so that the moral would be that the time has come to build a new organization which will represent in philosophy and action the genuine ideals of communism.<sup>1</sup>

## II

In this section I wish to address myself to those who either accept or are sympathetic to the ideals of communism and to raise certain fundamental questions concerning what passes for communism in many quarters. To such people, the contributions of Russell, Dewey and Cohen constitute a unique challenge for several reasons. First, not only are these men among the leading intellectual figures of their time—so that on purely theoretical grounds they would have to be answered—but they are in the front ranks of that movement of social liberalism which affirms its agreement with the ultimate ideals of a communist society and from which recruits to the cause of communism may be drawn. Second, they represent the attitude of thousands of intellectuals and professionals—no matter what their social origins—who not so eloquently and not so cogently, but just as insistently have been saying the things which these men have expressed in such precise form.<sup>2</sup> And it goes without saying how valuable the accession of this group would be to the communist cause. Third, the force of the argument is sufficiently impressive to justify asking, what elements in the position of official representatives of communism lay their doctrines open to these attacks, whether the doctrines attacked are really valid and can be successfully defended, and finally, if these doctrines are false, whether they are essential components of the social and political philosophy of communism or foreign ideological excrescences engrafted upon it.

My own position is briefly that the fundamental doctrine of communism is sound but it has been so wrapped up in certain dogmas that its logic and force has been obscured. What I desire to do is to enumerate some of the more important dogmas of official communism, show that they are false, trace their baleful influence upon the existing theory and practice of communists and point to the necessity of reformulating the communist position in such a way that, without surrendering in the slightest its revolutionary character, its appeal can be made both more widespread and effective than it has yet been in America.

I. The first dogma I wish to discuss is the view that communism is inevitable. Although in some of the practical analyses which communists make of daily affairs, the plain implication of their statements is that communism is not inevitable, yet the canonic doctrine of official communism, as well as of old line orthodox socialism, leaves little doubt that this view is not merely an expression of an emotional faith or a devout hope, but a fixed article of belief.<sup>3</sup> It requires very little analysis to show that no proof can be offered of the inevitability of the victory of a proletarian revolution;

<sup>1</sup> An important step in this direction, I believe, has been taken by the organization of the *American Workers' Party*.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to point out to those who confuse the *social function* of an idea and its socio-biographical *origin* that Russell's origins are aristocratic, Dewey's lower middle class, and Cohen's proletarian.

<sup>3</sup> *Communist*, March, 1933, p. 300.

and indeed all that Marx established was that the functioning of an economic order which fulfilled certain ideal conditions would in the course of time (1) lead to a progressive inability to dispose of commodities produced, to provide employment and to make a profitable return upon invested capital, and (2) result, in virtue of the processes of concentration and centralization, in the generation of the objective conditions for a new social order. Where he speaks of the expropriation of the expropriators in the "future present" tense, it is either dramatic, revolutionary prophecy or a prediction on the basis of certain psychological assumptions whose truth and invariance are by no means self-evident. The spatial metaphor of the collapse and breakdown of capitalism has been taken too literally. Capitalism may break down in the sense that the mechanisms of production, circulation and credit no longer function in a way to keep the majority of the population adequately fed or housed. But the social order which is ultimately based on human activities never breaks down. Human beings never cease their functioning; they go on from one act to another—either to a defense of what has broken down, in the sense considered before, or to attack.

To deny that communism is inevitable is not to deny the existence of social determinism any more than the scientist's denial of inevitability in nature implies the denial of causality. No. What is denied is that the conjunction of all the different factors (objective and subjective) which are necessary for social revolution can be deduced from an analysis of any unique set of economic data. Stated concretely, a Marxist examining the structure of the N R A can predict that in all likelihood the N R A will fail to accomplish its purposes. He cannot say on the basis of the economic analysis alone whether this failure of the N R A will produce a psychological reaction towards fascism or communism. *That, in part, depends upon his own activities.* Nor can he say whether, if the class-conscious masses do rise up to seize power, they will win the victory. *That, in part, depends upon the intelligence and courage of those who lead them.* All the factors are determined, but there is no one independent variable of which all the others are necessary functions. And one of the factors which determines or fails to determine the conjunction of all the necessary conditions into one complex sufficient condition is the activity which we undertake *now* after reflection.

The theoretical and practical consequences of this false theory of inevitability are more momentous than the question of its intrinsic validity. The first of them is that it makes unintelligible any activity in behalf of communism. I am not saying that belief in inevitability paralyzes activity in behalf of communism. On the contrary. It has often been pointed out that men are more ready to fight, and will fight more vigorously, in a battle in which they are sure they will win. What I am saying is that the belief in inevitability makes that activity unintelligible and unintelligent. In assuming that the consequences of one action or another are the same so far as the coming of communism is concerned, it denies that there are *genuine* alternatives of action—something which its propaganda assumes. It denies that moral judgments and evaluations of social activity are meaningful—something without which its agitation could not be successful. It denies that thinking makes any difference to the ultimate outcome, yet it propa-



gates a theory according to which theory and practice go hand in hand. It denies that mistakes are possible, or if possible that they are important, or if important that they could have been avoided. If the Panglosses believe (after Bradley) that "the world is the best of all possible worlds and everything in it is a necessary evil"; orthodox communists believe that communism is the only form of society possible after capitalism, and every mistake they make is a necessary means of achieving it.

The second consequence of the dogma of inevitability is that it strengthens the belief in the doctrine of "spontaneity," which teaches that the daily experiences of the working class spontaneously generates political class consciousness. If the economic consequences of capitalism lead inevitably to communism, then, since it is admitted that the revolution—like all history—is made by men, it must be held that the economic consequences of capitalism inevitably give rise to revolutionary class consciousness. In fact, this is the belief both of orthodox social-democracy and present-day official communism, Lenin's *What's To Be Done?* to the contrary notwithstanding. When it is believed that revolutionary consciousness develops spontaneously in the masses, there takes place a systematic and wholesale overestimation of the readiness for revolutionary activity upon the part of trade unions, unemployed organizations, coöperatives, etc., a mistaking of restiveness for radicalism, a tendency to read into the masses the perfervid psychological intensity of an isolated, political group which thinks that because it *calls* itself a vanguard it has thereby created a mass army behind it. Worst of all the doctrine of spontaneity is used as a justification for the policy of split and schismatic fission. What difference does it make that the ranks are thinned or if doctrinal content is watered down, when there is an unlimited reservoir of revolutionary energy which is sure to boil over as the heat of the class struggle increases? The doctrine of spontaneity makes it easy to mistake the wish for the deed, to rely upon the magic incantation of slogan and resolutions, and to take comfort in the "voice," the "logic," the "dictates" of historic destiny or whatever other pious formula may be found. These tend to become substitutes for the patient accumulation of organizational power, and for the development of realistic techniques of actually reaching the working masses, winning those who are reached and holding those who are won.

A further consequence of the dogma of inevitability is that it makes for an uncritical acceptance and imitation of the strategy and tactics employed by the first working-class group which comes to power. If communism is inevitable, then everything leading up to it is regarded as inevitable. Precedents of tactics which originally flowed from a special historical situation are converted into precedents of principle. The Russification of the strategy, tactics and very terminology of communist parties of the world is a case in point. A theory which is avowedly scientific must approach the problem of the conquest of power with the same care and regard for the national economic, cultural and psychological terrain as an army campaigning against another must consider the physical terrain. To be sure, if principles are lost, everything is lost,—but if principles constitute our only knowledge in hand, nothing can be gained. One could cite chapter and

verse to show that these methodological commonplaces are recognized on *paper* by orthodox spokesmen of communism. But what I am trying to call attention to is the fact that the theory remains a pious resolution—mocked at in practice—and to indicate one of the *contributory* causes therefor. The basic reasons for the spread of these dogmas in communist ranks are political. But this is another story.

The most fateful and pressing of all the immediate consequences of the dogma of inevitability is that there is observable on the part of communists throughout the world a tendency sometimes to speak, and more often to act (Germany, 1931-1933) as if fascism were inevitable, and to regard fascism as one more step, this time the last, towards communism, presumably because fascism succeeds in doing what the communists failed to do, viz., to wipe out social-democracy. The wildest confusion prevails in communist quarters on this subject, with unanimity on only two points: that the coming of fascism represents the realization of "one of the basic pre-conditions of the revolutionary crisis" (!); and that "the struggle against fascism is in the first place the struggle to defeat the social democracy," for which purpose a "united front" against fascism is offered to the social-democracy—with what sincerity can be imagined. But what the policy of the Third International is on the whole matter is clearly indicated by Mr. Walter Duranty, about whose reliability as a reporter on most matters official communists themselves harbor no doubts. In his dispatch on the last congress of the Russian Communist Party, Mr. Duranty wrote:

It is noteworthy also that M. Molotoff spoke of the increasing strength of the Russian Bolshevist party as the "vanguard of the Communist International" and declared that the working masses and oppressed colonial peoples throughout the world were concerned in and encouraged by Soviet progress.

This sounds strange in a period when fascism rather than communism appears to be the world answer to social crises, but it is explained by the fact that the Bolsheviki have succeeded in persuading themselves that fascism is not an obstacle but an inevitable step on the road to world revolution. Right or wrong, it is a comforting thought for the Bolsheviki at the present juncture and, anyway, it enables their congress to enjoy the full flavor of the undoubted successes in the building of socialism in the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Duranty, whom no one will accuse of being a "counter-revolutionary Trotskyite," has here put his finger on the chief political factor which accounts for the intensity with which these and other dogmas are held. If all energies are to be devoted to "building socialism in one country" and the function of other Communist Parties is primarily to serve as "frontier guards" of the U.S.S.R., so that Russia's successes may inspire other countries to believe in communism and follow its example (an amazing idealistic view of social causation)—what other dogmas can be so effective in enabling official communists, in Mr. Duranty's words, "to enjoy the full flavor" of the Russian successes and to dismiss as mere incidents the calamities in Germany, Italy and Austria, and the diminishing influence of Communist Parties—and therefore even their effectiveness as "frontier guards"—throughout the world? And as if to elucidate the point, Mr. Duranty adds in a subsequent dispatch on Russia's surprise and confusion over the Austrian events:

<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, January 28, 1934.

The only Communist party congress held in three and a half years has devoted itself to two questions which in a sense are one—the second Five-Year Plan and the organization of the party and governmental system to handle the same most efficiently. Foreign problems have been considered primarily in the light of the plan—that is, their possible effect upon it. It is true that the speakers, from M. Stalin down, have talked of world revolution and have even given the Communist International an occasional pat on the head. But that has been only a side issue.

It was clear throughout to any impartial observer that 70 per cent of Soviet interest was concentrated on the Five-Year Plan and its organization, 29 per cent on foreign affairs in so far as they might hinder or help the plan, and maybe[!] 1 per cent on foreign affairs in regard to world revolution.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Duranty's "maybe" suggests that he does not know how to handle fractions. However, these important political problems cannot be further discussed here.

2. The second dogma which I wish to question is the view that all communists must be dialectical materialists and that all dialectical materialists must be communists. It is this proposition which is the source of that peculiar hodge-podge of politics, antiquated science, proletarian culture, idealistic philosophy and mystical nonsense which goes by the name of the present-day party-attitude-in-philosophy. That it is not Marxian does not have to be argued, except against those who assume that Marx developed a philosophical attitude in violation of common sense, the laws of logic, elementary notions of scientific method and the proposition that twice two is four. I believe it is possible to present dialectical materialism as a plausible scientific philosophy which might be described in the technical idiom of contemporary Anglo-American philosophy as experimental, evolutionary naturalism; but here I merely wish to discuss that species of dialectical materialism which is regarded as the official communist brand today. The most authoritative spokesman for this species of dialectical materialism is L. Rudas of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, Moscow. I quote some sentences from an exposition written especially for English readers:<sup>2</sup>

1. Dialectical materialism is cast from one mould, it is a strictly monistic theory.
2. Without dialectics there can be no scientific picture of the world, without dialectics the separate sciences are condemned to groping in the dark, without dialectics there is no correct method for investigation—of an individual or single region. Still less is it possible for the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat to exist without materialist dialectics.
3. *Without a recognition of the dialectical synthesis of the formation of new and higher unities in nature and society not a single step can be taken in science.*
4. And how could a non-Communist be a dialectical materialist. For dialectical materialism means recognition of the social revolution, of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the concrete solution of the social contradictions.
5. In our epoch what Marx predicted by the aid of the dialectical method has been verified almost word for word; . . . the Communist Party is the only party which can truly forecast the course of events in capitalist society and which predicts and also realizes the inevitable social revolution.
6. It may be objected here that, granted that the recognition of the dialectics of society is inseparable from Communism, yet dialectical materialism is more than this, it is a philosophy which one can reject or partially accept without ceasing to be a Communist. It is easy to see that this objection does not hold water. The dialectics of society is only a special case of the *general dialectics* of the world, since society, in the

<sup>1</sup> February 18, 1934.

<sup>2</sup> All citations are from the article "Dialectical Materialism and Communism," *Labour Monthly*, September and October, 1933. All italics in the original.

- last resort, is also part of nature, and has developed from nature. Whoever does not recognize the dialectics of nature, cannot recognize, without illogicality, the dialectics of society either.
7. The pre-requisite for understanding dialectical materialism is a decisive break with the traditional mode of thought, *the revolutionizing of thinking*, and also sooner or later enrollment in the ranks of the revolutionary party.
  8. Plekhanov and even Bukharin were not in a position to give an unexceptionable exposition of dialectical materialism, in the last resort also because they did not have an unexceptionable line in politics.
  9. Dialectics not only points out to the proletariat its historical task, but it gives the proletariat the certainty of victory, it is to a certain extent the *guarantee of this victory*.

It is hard to believe that Mr. Rudas and other orthodox dialectical materialists really subscribe to this philosophy, for some of the plain implications of the above statements are so astonishing that they may be said to constitute a *reductio ad absurdum* of the position. Look at statements 2, 3, 4 and 7. They furnish the major and minor premises of a neat little syllogism:

None but those who have an adequate grasp of dialectics and dialectical materialism can have a correct understanding of the methods, the truths and achievements of science in nature or society;

None but those who are sooner or later enrolled in the ranks of the Communist Party can have an adequate grasp of dialectics and dialectical materialism;

Ergo, none but members of the Communist Party can have a correct understanding of natural or social science.

This surpasses anything that the Catholic Church at the heyday of its temporal power ever proclaimed. To hold seriously that a correct understanding of nature and society is possible only to members of the Communist Party is to say that only members of the Communist Party *can know the truth about anything*—whether it concern problems of mathematics, physics, psychology, art or politics. To say this is to furnish the emotional premise for a ruthless policy of suppression and censorship in every domain of knowledge, since if we are convinced that we have the truth while others who are not members of the Communist Party *must* be in error, we are justified in protecting society by liquidating the sources of illusion, error and deceit. And this is offered in the name of a “scientific” philosophy, a “critical” party which strives to preserve the best in human culture, and—of Marxism!

Now look at statement 8! The insane logic goes even further and revenges itself upon those who are victimized by it. It is not enough to be a member of the Communist Party—this is only a necessary condition—one must have an “unexceptionable line in politics” correctly to understand dialectical materialism. What does it mean not to have an “unexceptionable line in politics”? It means to be in disagreement with the views of the leader or leading group of the party. If one agrees with Bukharin about the rate of agrarian collectivization and not with Stalin, or with Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution and not with Stalin’s theory of socialism in one country, one is not in a position to expound or understand properly dialectical materialism. True insight into *anything* is determined by a correct political line and a correct political line is determined by the enlightened leadership. There is only one step from this theory of the divine illumination of the bureaucracy to the theory of the divine right of bureaucracy.

And I submit that this is more than a figure of speech, for as I shall show below, "nature" in the orthodox philosophy of dialectical materialism plays the same rôle as "God."<sup>1</sup>

That these implications will be denied by some members of the Communist Party does not alter the fact that they flow from their premises. On any monistic theory which holds that the universe is organically determined through and through—whether it be the absolute idealism of Hegel or orthodox dialectical materialism—it follows that we cannot know the truth about anything unless we know the truth about everything, that if we are wrong about anything we *must* be wrong about everything, that if any single event had turned out differently, every other event in the history of nature and man would have been different, that genuine possibility and novelty become mysteries whose existence can be admitted only at the cost of glaring contradiction. Fortunately, even those who refuse to learn from experience cannot believe such a philosophy to be true, for its very logic is self-defeating. Since at no time can anyone in his senses maintain that he knows the truth about everything, he must admit in accordance with the premises that the philosophy of organic determinism cannot be true nor, if true, can it be known to be true.

This is not the place to present a proof of the inadequacy of the fundamental propositions of the orthodox variety of dialectical materialism. Suffice it to say that it confuses the most elementary distinctions recognized in logic and scientific method and conceals this from itself by mistaking downright logical contradiction for an illustration of the higher dialectic. I need only point to the view (statement 6) that the dialectics of society is a *special case* of the dialectics of the world of nature on the ground that "in the last resort society is also part of nature." This is not merely completely un-Marxian, it is utterly unintelligible. The categories of history and society are not special cases of the categories of physical and natural science. In science the idea of a "special case" presupposes an identical categorial

<sup>1</sup> One of the minor dogmas which I have no space to treat and which strengthens the belief in the infallibility of leadership, derives from an abuse of the Marxian distinction between subjective intention and objective consequence. Official communists are quick to accuse other communists, who disagree with them and criticize the official line, as "counter-revolutionists" because their criticisms are sometimes seized upon by non-communists. The ground offered for the use of such harsh terms is the principle: "Subjective intentions are irrelevant in judging an action; only the objective consequences must be considered." If this principle is assumed as a postulate then it requires only one plausible material premise to get both a startling and an amusing conclusion. The argument runs:

- (1) Subjective intentions are irrelevant in evaluating an action; only objective consequences must be considered.
- (2) A political mistake, by definition, has counter-revolutionary objective consequences.
- (3) If *S.*, our leader, makes a political mistake, he is a counter-revolutionist.
- (4) But *S.*, our leader, cannot be a counter-revolutionist.
- (5) Therefore *S.*, our leader, is in political matters infallible.

The conclusion in a weakened form permits *S.* to make only little mistakes, *i.e.*, those that have no serious consequences.

I submit that if postulate (1) and material premise (4) be granted, then the conclusion cannot be avoided. Official communists *insist* upon postulate (1); and the material premise (4) is assumed on psychologically necessary grounds by all who join a revolutionary party.

domain whose general laws, expressed in variables, receive specific application by the substitution of constant values, as when we say that Galileo's laws for falling bodies is a special case of Newton's laws of motion. But the class struggle is not a special case of "the struggle for existence" nor is either one of these, in turn, a special case of the fundamental "laws of motion." Engels may have defined dialectics as the science of the universal laws of motion and evolution in nature, human society and thought, but he would have ridiculed out of court the notion that the laws of thought or human society are *special cases* of the laws of nature: If that were true we should be able to explain significant aspects of *human* history in terms of the most general field-equations of physics and approach the problems of *conscious* life and *meaningful* expression with the biological categories of stimulus and response. Even Mr. Rudas is compelled to criticize mechanism and behaviorism (with bad arguments, to be sure), but he does so in happy innocence of the fact that his premises logically do not permit him to do so. To speak of the laws of motion of consciousness is like speaking of the virtue of triangles. The shift in meaning from "nature," as that which is distinct from man and history, to "nature" as the inclusive totality of all existence including man and social life confounds the confusion. Characteristic shifts in meaning can be observed in practically all fundamental terms in the vocabulary of dialectical materialists with the result that most of their analyses end in muddles instead of clarification.

The practical consequence of the view that dialectical materialists must be communists, and vice versa, is that it tends to spread the superstition that there is such a thing as a class view or party line in all branches of science and art, and presumably even in logic. Thousands of intelligent people working in these fields who have broken with capitalist ideology are asked to subscribe to the alleged class or party view of their special subject as part of their acceptance of the social ideals of communism. Otherwise they are reproached for being still infected with "rotten liberalism," guilty of right backslidings or left deviations. And so this dogma is used as a club to drive away from the communist position all those who have refused to gouge their eyes and brains out of their heads.

What is the genuine Marxian view of the relation between communism and other fields and branches of science and philosophy? Surely there are some views which are necessarily implied, and others which are denied, by the communist position. What is the method by which this is determined? I wish to sketch briefly what I believe to be the true answer to these questions.

To begin with, we must ask what is the fundamental view which distinguishes Marxism from all species of liberalism and socialism. It is clear that the key proposition of Marxism, in so far as it is a touchstone of differentiation from other social philosophies, is the theory of the state. For from the proposition that the state is the coercive instrument of the ruling class there follow all the other essential propositions which deal with the manner in which it must be overthrown, what must take its place, etc. But now the Marxian theory of the state presupposes other views. It is not presented as something self-evidently true but as a consequence of the application of the theory of historical materialism to social life. A Marxist, then,

must be an historical materialist and cannot consistently adhere to any contrary or contradictory philosophy of history. But historical materialism is the belief that "the mode of production in material life conditions the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life" (Marx). Now the extent to which this conditioning goes on is an empirical matter; different historical materialists have different theories which stress the influence of the mode of economic production in varying ways. Some admit an element of invariance in form in different material cultures; some deny it. Some exempt certain periods of music and fine arts from the scope of explanation; others include them. Some underscore reciprocal influences between different factors; others do not. *But it is interesting to observe that all species of historical materialism, whether it be that of Bukharin or Trotsky, Bogdanov or Gorter, Lužačs or Korsch are compatible with the view that the state is the coercive arm of the ruling class.* Consequently the acceptance of this last proposition does not necessarily imply any particular one of the different theories of historical materialism. I am not saying that all of these different theories of historical materialism are true. Only one can be true. But which one is true can be determined only by further historical research and analysis and not by a logical deduction from the Marxian theory of the state.

But now every historical materialist, no matter what his differences with others of his school, is committed to the propositions which are presupposed by the theory of historical materialism. For example, he must subscribe to a realistic theory of knowledge, for he holds that the social relations into which men enter are indispensable to their existence and independent of their individual wills and consciousness. All subjectivist epistemologies are therefore ruled out. But there are at least twenty-seven different realistic epistemologies which acknowledge the objective existence of the external world and recognize the dependence of consciousness upon the structure of the nervous system. *All of them are compatible with the theory of historical materialism.* Not all of these realistic epistemologies can be true. Some realists believe that ideas are reflex images of things, others that they are signs, still others that they are outgrowths of things. Only one of these theories can be true. But which one is true can be determined only by further philosophical and psychological analysis and not by a logical deduction from the theory of historical materialism.

A realistic theory of epistemology in the light of the development of the nervous system presupposes an evolutionary biology. But whether this evolutionary biology must be of a Lamarckian or Darwinian type it leaves undetermined, *for both are compatible with it even though only one can be true.* And the best proof of this that any Marxist can desire is the fact that Marx sketched his realistic activist theory of perception and his theory of historical materialism fully fourteen years before Darwin published his *Origin of Species*. How then can one claim that all of these theories logically involve each other? An acceptance of a realistic evolutionary biology in turn presupposes a belief in the existence of a physical world with a definite structure. But whether the structure of the world be Newtonian or Einsteinian is irrelevant to biology, for both are compatible with its findings even if only one can be true. None of Marx's historical, eco-

nomic and political doctrines had anything to do with the physics of his times.

It should be carefully noted that the combined implications of an evolutionary biology and psychology with their naturalistic, functional interpretation of purpose, are incompatible with any religious belief or any doctrine of cosmic design. A Marxist, then, cannot consistently subscribe to any religion, and the essence of any religion, as creed if not ritual, is belief in supernatural or cosmic purpose.

In addition to the argument above there is one simple fact which is fatal to the conception that dialectical materialism is a monistic theory which synthesizes all available knowledge from physics to the dictatorship of the proletariat into one organic whole. Marx's theories of historical materialism, surplus-value, class struggle, state and proletarian dictatorship were developed at a time when the physics, chemistry, biology, geology and anthropology of his day, and in which he naturally believed, had reached a certain stage. How can we hold that the first set of theories are still true today while the second set of beliefs (physics, etc.) are quite definitely false unless we admit that there is no *logical* connection between them? And if we admit this, why cannot a man be a communist who accepts all the distinctive propositions of Marx and yet disregards the pronouncements of the pundits of dialectical materialism on such questions as to whether light travels in waves, particles or wavicules, or whether the geometry of space is describable in Euclidean, Lobochevskian or Reimannian terms, or whether electrons take time in jumping from one orbit to another—questions which orthodox dialectical materialists have sought to answer with great courage but little knowledge?

To conclude this phase of the argument, then, a communist *must* be a dialectical materialist only in the sense that he is committed to all the necessary conditions which the affirmation of the communist position implies; but there is no intelligible sense, except by arbitrary definition, in which a dialectical materialist must be a communist.

The full significance of the dogma that dialectical materialism and the social philosophy of communism mutually imply each other can be grasped only when it is taken together with the previous dogma, already discussed, that communism is inevitable. For it now follows that dialectical materialism, as a synthesis of the material and methods of the sciences, necessarily implies the victory of the communist revolution. It not only gathers the relevant material on the basis of which valid social ideals may be formulated; it teaches that in the nature of things these social ideals *must* arise and *must* triumph. "Dialectics," says Rudas (statement 9), "not only points out to the proletariat its historical task, but it gives the proletariat the certainty of victory, it is to a certain extent the *guarantee of this victory.*" Whoever understands the universe properly then, i.e., from the standpoint of dialectical materialism, will see (1) that the world of nature and society could not have been different from what it is and the victory of communism still be possible, and (2) that the structure of the universe is such that that victory is logically already involved in the relationships discovered by dialectics. This is the promise of entire creation. The stars in their courses proclaim it; the ocean floor supports it; and man in his brief career realizes



it. Even if life on this planet were destroyed, this philosophy offers the assurance that it would arise somewhere else and begin its pilgrimage to that one far-off event—or succession of events—towards which the cosmos is striving. Communism, it is admitted, will disappear but the same natural processes which insure its disappearance *necessitate* its coming—the Lord be praised!

*But what passes away at one point of the universe, develops anew at another. One solar system passes away, new ones develop. Life passes away from the earth, it arises elsewhere anew. In this sense, dialectical materialism asserts an eternal development; what exists evolves. It evolves because the dialectical self-movement of every thing which exists is a driving force towards development. Decay holds in general for special cases; the endlessness of development holds only for the infinite universe sub specie aeternitatis.*<sup>1</sup>

This not only suggests the familiar consolations of religion; it is an outright expression of the theology of absolute idealism with all its attendant logical difficulties. What an ironic illustration of the alleged dialectic law of the transformation of a thesis into its opposite! Marxism, which is militant atheism, presented as sentimental theology! The indignant repudiation of this charge by Rudas and other orthodox dialectical materialists is only a measure of their inconsistency and of their failure to grasp the essence of the religious attitude. Because they eschew the use of the word *God* or *Absolute Spirit* and insist that there is no external source of movement but that every movement is *self-movement*, they feel that they have escaped religion when all they have done is to replace a transcendent theology with an immanent theology. For what is essential to religion is not the use of the term *God* but the belief that the universe is somehow friendly to man and human purpose, that natural processes are such that they must realize the highest human ideals (e.g., communism, if one believes in it), that these processes cannot be adequately understood without such reference, and that despite momentary defeats and setbacks the victory of the highest human ideals (i.e., the proletarian revolution) is guaranteed by the mechanisms of nature and society. To inspire this belief in the minds and hearts of its adherents is the precise function of the theology of orthodox dialectical materialism. It is as far removed from the philosophy of Marx as the philosophy of Marx is removed from the absolute idealism of Hegel which Marx criticized for its supernaturalism, mysticism and logical inconsistency. This must be stressed not only against orthodox dialectical materialists but also against critics of Marx, like Max Eastman, who attribute to Marx the silly views of the present-day orthodox brood whom he would have been the first to disown.

3. The third dogma I wish to consider flows out of the confusion among official party communists on the nature of dictatorship and democracy. I have already argued that truly understood communism does not involve the negation of democracy but its fulfillment, and that one of the criteria by which a communist evaluates the culture of a civilization is by the character of its democratic processes and the possibility of their expansion. Such a statement, however, in its abstract form can be easily misunderstood. To non-communists it will appear as a deliberate evasion of the true communist position; to communists as an inadmissible concession to bourgeois democ-

<sup>1</sup> Rudas, *Labour Monthly*, September, 1933. Italics in the original.

racy. Lack of space prevents a proper concrete and historical analysis, for the question of what is a democracy cannot be settled by definitions. But I wish to point out that no matter how formal democracy be defined, the material conditions of social inequality make it impossible for political democratic forms to serve as the instrumentalities of a common welfare. Modern political democracy was the historical resultant of many interacting forces of which indisputably the strongest were the changes in the mode of production and the needs which they set up. The polarizing consequence of the further development and expansion of the underlying economy has been to widen the gap between the pretensions of formal democracy to serve all classes in the community and the actual operation of existing democratic forms. The mechanisms of inducing and registering "the consent of the governed" are derived from, and are continuously influenced by, the needs of the class which holds economic power and not vice versa. And when, as in capitalist countries throughout the world, the traditional democratic political forms turn out to be an inadequate brake upon the accumulation of social discontent and a needless expense and time-consuming luxury for the administration of the economic plant, they are rapidly transformed or discarded. Corresponding to the acuteness of the economic contradictions—and in the absence of an *aktionsfähig* revolutionary movement, we get at one end the "gentle social planning" of MacDonal and Roosevelt and at the other, the fascism of Mussolini and Hitler.

According to communist theory, with the shift in economic power from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat, effected by the revolution, democracy is not destroyed but merely the old democratic forms, which at best served to conceal the brute facts of social inequality and which more often than not were flouted in a thousand different ways by those who gave them lip-allegiance. The new state bases itself upon the productive unit of socialized society and is administered by representatives of the producers organized into workers' councils. All those who are not producers (able but unwilling) are automatically excluded from the automatic processes; where they engage in any overt activity to overthrow the social conditions of the new democracy, they are naturally suppressed. The new state is not a complete democracy because not all elements of the population can be converted overnight into reliable producers. As distinct from all other states it does not conceal its class basis. But the workers' state claims to be more democratic than any other state which has hitherto existed (1) for since the overwhelming mass of the population is made up of producers, they have an opportunity to influence and check the social processes which affect them, and (2) because the workers' state aims at the progressive expansion of its democratic processes by drawing as soon as possible the whole of the population into the ranks of producers. What Engels describes as the "withering away of the state," i.e., the elimination of the suppressive functions of the state (army, prisons, etc.), is only the correlative aspect of the extension of the producers' circle to a point where it includes the entire able-bodied population.

Now the dogma I wish to challenge is that the state will necessarily wither away and that any automatic guarantees can be provided against the abuse of power by those who constitute the leadership of the Communist

Party during this transitional period. I am particularly anxious to do this because there are some official communists who think that "the dictatorship of the proletariat" justifies the denial of democratic rights to dissenting proletarian groups which, although they accept the class basis of the state, may differ with certain policies of the Communist Party. Some go even further and justify the ruthless suppression of dissenting factions in the Communist Party and the abrogation of all party democracy except for those who agree with the leadership. In this way the political processes of the workers' state are corrupted and become the means by which a bureaucracy keeps itself in power. The only possible instrumentality by which the "withering away of the state" can be assured is discarded. The result is a degenerate workers' state in which the most important decisions are made by an uncontrollable bureaucracy. In such a state, the workers may be kept well-fed and housed because the social nature of production makes it impossible for the bureaucrats to accumulate capital although they can squander social wealth and human energy by costly mistakes. In such a state, however, the workers can never be free to criticize and control the bureaucracy nor individually free from the bureaucratic terror which can imprison or exile them at will. Let us remember that it was the materialist, Marx, who said that "the proletariat regards its courage, self-confidence, independence and sense of personal dignity as more necessary than its daily bread."

According to communist theory, the Communist Party is the vanguard of the proletariat not only in the struggle to overthrow capitalism but in the transitional period as well. This means that the function of the Communist Party is not to exercise a dictatorship over the proletariat but to educate the proletariat to a consciousness of its class interest and to lead in the execution of the class will. In the transition period the necessity of preserving the workers' state against counter-revolution is so great that under certain historical circumstances the Communist Party may contest with some justification the right of other working-class parties to exist as political parties. *All the more imperative does it therefore become to permit the workers' councils or soviets, the trade unions and other working-class associations the fullest freedom of discussion and criticism* so that the policies of the Communist Party may be checked by the experience of the class whose vanguard it proclaims itself to be. The Communist Party itself must be subject to some system of democratic controls, otherwise with what authority, aside from force, can it promulgate its own laws as the laws of the workers' state? Where the vital life of the workers' councils is throttled by the imposition of controls from the Communist Party, where the accounting for responsibilities in social production is made to the party and not to the executive organs of the councils themselves, where foreign politics are determined by the party—in short, *where the councils reign but the party rules*—there we may have a workers' state but not a workers' democracy.

Where the Communist Party preëmpts all the functions of the government, the social problems which arise receive articulate discussion not in the workers' councils but in the party circles. The same logic, however, which removes the power to make the important decisions from the hands of the representatives of the workers' councils, which reveals its distrust of

the considered opinions and desires of the rank and file producers, leads to the abrogation of party democracy. Control is from "the leader" down who in the intervals between party congresses can always insure, by virtue of the bureaucratic administration of the party apparatus and press, a chorus of *Vivas!* sufficient to drown out whatever muttered opposition there is.

From whence, then, the certainty that the state and, therefore, the political party will "wither away" unless the democratic institutions of the workers' state are permitted to function and expand? The existence of a bureaucracy means the existence, to be sure, not of an independent class but of a social group capable of abusing power. That the possibilities of the abuse of power in *economic* matters will be limited by the progressive development of productive forces, which in time will provide material necessities for all, is beside the point. There are abuses of power other than economic—abuses to which the increasing complexity of personality in a socialized society may make men peculiarly sensitive. Theoretically it is not inconceivable that a bureaucracy may begin to restrict privileges of higher education to its partisans, to develop a mythology which tends to perpetuate its own rule and to attempt to initiate government by experts. There are no guaranteed safeguards against this eventuality except untiring activity to make the proletarian dictatorship, not only in its *property form* but in its *political functioning*, a proletarian democracy.

It is for this reason that it seems to me desirable to counterpose "a workers' democracy" to "bourgeois dictatorship." At certain times even lexicography has political implications—and at no time more than today. The slogan "a workers' democracy," on the one hand, marks off the true communist from the official communist who uses the phrase "dictatorship of the proletariat" as a euphemism for the dictatorship of the Communist Party bureaucracy over its own members and over the working class; and, on the other hand, the slogan "a workers' democracy" prevents the too-easy identification on the part of the unpolitical worker of the proletarian dictatorship with the fascist dictatorships. The dictatorship of the Fascist Party is an essential part of the political system of fascism and is the only way by which capitalism can preserve itself against disintegration; the dictatorship of the Communist Party bureaucracy is a foreign excrescence upon the structure of the workers' state, as well as upon the true communist party.

4. The fourth dogma I wish to discuss represents not so much a part of the creed of orthodox communism but a tendency observable in its cultural philosophy and practice. This is the dogma of "the collective man." The Communist Party claims to have no official line for creative artists to follow but the fact that, by its own theories, art is an expression of social conditions, and therefore of politics, and the further fact that its politics leaves no room for any critical dissent, give a characteristic stamp to the literature, art and very patterns of life which the official press approves.

From the premise that history can be most adequately understood, and made, by the guiding principles of the class struggle, some communists have inferred that the only valid ideals for life and letters are those that celebrate the achievements of the mass and the class. The "collectivity" as the hero of the novel, the objective political needs of the moment as the theme of

poetry, the selected historical event as the subject matter of the play—all this of course is nothing new. It may be found in some of the great artistic treasures of earlier times. Nor is this emphasis peculiarly characteristic of what has been called "proletarian culture." The fascization of culture in Italy and Germany similarly attacks (from different ideological premises) individualistic and personal artistic forms as decadent, liberal and smacking of petty-bourgeois anarchy. It, too, seeks to convert the politically exigent into the aesthetically relevant. In fact, it carries matters to absurdity by making political implications the sole consideration. But for historical reasons the cultural ideals of communism—even in "the transitional period"—have been interpreted as involving the glorification of the mass and the disparagement of the individual. Hostile critics who desire to lump fascism and communism together have not hesitated to say that the only difference between the cultural philosophy of fascism and communism is that where the latter says "proletariat," the former says "the state," and that what they both mean is "the political party."

It cannot be too much stressed, therefore, that communism is hostile to individualism, as a social theory, and not to individuality, as a social value. It seeks to provide the material guarantee of security without which the free development of individuality or personality is an empty or impossible ideal. But the *free development of personality remains its ideal*; difference, uniqueness, independence and creative originality are intrinsic values to be fostered and strengthened; and indeed one of the strongest arguments against capitalism is that it prevents these values from flourishing for all but a few. Communists recognize, however, that the social content of these values, the forms and conditions of their expression, are historical variables. They therefore repudiate the notion that because the social content and patterns of personality in a communist culture will be different from those of the eighteenth century country squire, the nineteenth century industrial freebooter or the twentieth century captain of industry—they are any less genuine and valuable. Communists grant—as every honest person must—that in any society where mechanical impositions of external constraints upon cultural activity or thought exist, where material deprivation and psychic lynching are the automatic consequences of cultural criticism, a premium is placed upon social conformity and upon that type of virtue which is made up of two parts inconspicuity, one part silence and one part diplomatic assent. That is why it is the duty of every principal communist to be sharply critical of the cultural excesses committed by the heresy hunting orthodox Russian communists, especially in the fields of literature and technical philosophy.

Where the free development of personality remains the ideal, there can be no abridgement—even in the transitional period, only *one* of whose limits, let it be remembered, is determined—of the right to believe and actively hold independent or unpopular views in all cultural and scientific fields. That this right may sometimes lead to an expression of views which border on the *politically dangerous* is no more a justification for censoring critical and independent cultural thought than the fact that sometimes anecdotes circulate which undermine the prestige of the political leader constitutes a reason for declaring a political taboo against humor. One of

the reasons why official communists do not see this can be traced to their uncritical assumption that the whole of culture is involved in, and relevant to, a criticism of any part of it. Consequently, to challenge the ruling dogma in philosophy or art is also to strike a blow at the foundations of the workers' state. This belief in a cultural monism will no more stand analysis than the belief in a metaphysical monism. It can flourish only when the fear of having to answer critical questions about the validity of the political line of the party is so great that all forms of criticism are discouraged, lest the habit of criticism spread. But where there is no criticism, intellectual life perishes.

One more word in conclusion. No matter what the cultural and moral philosophy of communists be, I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that communism, as a social system, will be an immense improvement over capitalism so far as the distribution of material goods and comforts is concerned. But the extent to which communism as a social system makes possible the development of a free culture for free and creative personalities—that does not depend upon the system of economic production but primarily upon the living communist men and women themselves, upon the type of leadership which arises and the type of membership which permits that leadership to develop. It seems to me that only communism can save the world from its social evils; it seems to me to be just as evident that the official Communist Party or any of its subsidiary organizations cannot be regarded as a Marxist, critical or revolutionary party today. The conclusion is, therefore, clear: *the time has now come to build a new revolutionary party in America and a new revolutionary international.*

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