

THE GENESIS OF COMMUNISM

II. MARXIAN COMMUNISM ITSELF

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ARL MARX was a man of his time. This is at once the reason for his successes and his failures. In his nineteenth century, liberalism enjoyed philosophical vogue. In one sense, Marx recognized its sharp inconsistencies. He condemned its economics, which encouraged cut-throat competition and forbade legitimate organization to the workers lest individual freedom of contract be hindered. He lashed at its politics, which threatened continual war in the name of nationalism. He scoffed at its religion, so often the servant of the state, which embraced a most bewildering mass of contradictory hypotheses. He sought to overthrow its inhuman sociology, the bitter memories of which live in the vivid novels of Dickens.

Despite all his opposition to liberalism, Marx nevertheless could not entirely free himself from its spirit. He could not deny his philosophical parents, Hegel and Feuerbach. Their liberalistic speculations permeate the pages of *Capital* and all the other writings of Marx and his intimate ally, Engels. One has but to briefly analyze their teachings to understand this contention.

Marx, first of all, was an Hegelian. Yet he interpreted Hegel's dialectic in terms of Feuerbach's materialism. Once admit the materialistic conception of reality, the existence of a spiritual soul is denied and, following that, God, religion and morality. "Religion," said Marx, "is opium for the people," and the fallacy of the idealistic argument for the existence of God, which makes God a figment of the mind instead of an objective reality, seemed to corroborate his opinion. Engels offers another reason. "In our evolutionary conception of the universe, there is absolutely no room for either a Creator or a Ruler."¹

¹ In his "Special Introduction" to *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* (Aveling ed.; New York, 1892), p. xv.

What, then, is the determining factor in social life, if not God and the eternal law? Marx claims "The aggregate of . . . productive relationships constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis on which a juridical and political superstructure rises, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of the material means of existence conditions the whole process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness."²

While Marx and Engels accepted the material determinism of Feuerbach, at the same time they insinuated the dialectical evolution of Hegel in what is often termed "historical materialism." "I use the term 'historical materialism'," writes Engels, "to designate that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all historical events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the mode of production and exchange."³ "The final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought not in men's brains, not in man's better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought not in the *philosophy* but in the *economics* of each particular period."⁴

In what the modes of production and exchange consist remains yet to be explained. Marx develops this proposition in *Capital*. The explanation of commerce generally proceeds in this way:—First, it is assumed that in the course of exchange, the parties demand equivalents (in the Marxian sense), which necessitates a measure of both that which is given and that which is received in exchange. This requires a common characteristic by which they can be measured—namely, labor. Once admit (if one can) that labor is the source of all value, then it must be the source of surplus value, or profits. Of this theory, Marx once said his "explanation of the source of profits is a paradox and contrary to everyday observation and experience."⁵ Nevertheless, retaining it as an integral step in his system, Marx maintained that capital appropriates the surplus value, and since,

² Preface to *The Critique of Political Economy*, in *A Handbook of Marxism* (London, 1935) pp. 371-372.

³ *Introd., Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. xviii-xix.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁵ In a paper communicated to the Socialist International Congress of 1865. Quoted by Elder, B., *A Study in Socialism* (St. Louis, 1915), p. vii.

under capitalistic enterprise, labor creates much surplus value through mechanical efficiency which it does not receive in wages, a struggle of labor against capital for the added wealth follows.

The struggle of labor with capital tends towards "the dictatorship of the proletariat," in which the workers would collectively own and administer the instruments of production. Thus they could then collect the surplus value. In a note explaining the *Communist Manifesto*, Engels defined "proletariat" as "the class of modern wage-laborers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labor in order to live." The means of effecting the proletarian revolution is violence: ". . . in the words of Marx, it (violence) is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with the new, . . ."⁶

The establishment of the proletarian dictatorship will bring about changed social conditions. "With the transfer of the means of production into common ownership, the individual family ceases to be the economic unit of society."^{6a} According to Marxist theory, ". . . the first divisions of property in primitive society gave rise to a corresponding division of society into classes, and there sprang up between these classes a struggle for position which resulted in the formation of the State. With the narrowing of the division of property through time, the economic interests of classes were narrowed to individual interests, and there sprang up in each individual the desire to perpetuate his holdings by transmitting to his offspring; hence the Family became necessary that the individual might know his offspring." Women have been subject to men only because they have been less efficient economically. With the disestablishment of private property, all this will change—women will step into industry as man's equal, the rearing of children will fall under community regulation, and the family as such will cease to exist. Similarly, the State as the "most powerful economic class" (Engels), must fall under the proletarian onslaught, and all the world will coalesce in the Communist International. In this connection, it might be noted that the state as Marx conceived it is "a new institution not known in the

⁶ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in the *Handbook of Marxism*, p. 278.

^{6a} Marx-Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, in the *Handbook*, p. 304.

⁷ Elder, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

feudal period; only after the dissolution of the political power of the Church was the state established."⁸

Since the ultimate end of Marxism is the dictatorship of the proletariat, its ethics serve that goal alone. Actions are good or bad according as they promote or hinder the attainment of the economic Utopia. Bebel explains, "Each social stage of development has its own condition of production, and each likewise has its own code of morals, which is but the reflection of the social conditions. That is moral which is usage."⁹

After the lifetimes of Marx and Engels, their writings roused acrid controversy among Socialists. Various schools, interpreting the doctrine in degrees of severity and mitigation ranging from deep red to pale pink, sprouted in Europe and America. The history of these rivalries is long and involved. In the light of what has now come to pass, however, the Russian schools of Marxist thought deserve particular attention. Largely through the influence of Lenin, the Marxian ideology has, in Russia, been given a practical test.

Leninism

At the dawn of the twentieth century, two distinct tendencies of Russian Marxism manifested themselves. One sought to use Marxism either "to create in Russia a capitalism of the western bourgeois type" or to establish "the so-called economism which would divest the Labour movement of its political character and restrict it to the struggle for higher wages, insurance against sickness, and the like."¹⁰ The other school comprised "a body under strict discipline based on a rigid Marxian creed and governed by a central committee of professional revolutionaries devoted to combating the Tsardom."¹¹ This latter, Lenin's party, became in succeeding years the Bolshevik, or majority group.

When, in 1917, the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia, Lenin's teachings became the orthodox interpretation of Marxism for Communists. His dialectical materialism "applies to itself its thesis that all knowledge depends upon social and historical conditions—as the knowledge which is the instrument of revolution and of the class which is the organ of revolution, the proletariat. Its conclusions can never, therefore, be opposed

⁸ Jaszi, O., "Socialism" in *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, XIV, p. 201.

⁹ Quoted by Elder, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

¹⁰ Gurian, W., *Bolshevism: Theory & Practice* (New York, 1934), p. 44.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

to revolutionary practice.”¹² Lenin persistently identifies the dialectic movement with the proletarian party, the organ of action. He rejects the *evolutionary* interpretation of Marxism and insists on the efficacy of revolt; “some days are equivalent to several decades.” “The state” in the words of Lenin “is simply the weapon with which the proletariat wages its class war. A special sort of bludgeon, nothing more.”

According to Gurian, “Lenin’s peculiarity consisted in the combination of a rigid and even doctrinaire creed with an extremely skillful and pliant strategy and propaganda.”¹³ He sternly opposed the strict equality sometimes attributed to Marxists. “Engels was a thousand times right when he wrote, ‘Any demand for equality which goes beyond the demand for the abolition of classes is a stupid and absurd prejudice.’”¹⁴ He taught his followers to carry on the revolution in one country at a time, to “turn the imperialistic war into civil war,” that the Soviet Union is a potent means for the suppression of foreign capitalism. His opposition to religion is obvious. “Marxism is materialism. As such it is relentlessly opposed to religion, as was the materialism of the Encyclopedists of the eighteenth century, or as was the materialism of Feuerbach. This is beyond doubt.”¹⁵

The Communist International

The Communist International is the official depository of Leninistic Marxism. Upon the death of Lenin, Joseph Stalin gradually gained control of this body, through which, from the Soviet Union as a center, he directs the progress of the proletarian revolution throughout the world. The International is not the official Russian government, yet its direction of Soviet policies is unmistakable. Stalin speaks of it thus: “In our country the Communist Party directs the government. . . . What forms does this direction assume? First of all, by the fact that the Communist Party strives to appoint through the Soviets and their Congresses Communist candidates to all key posts in the State work. . . . In this the party is successful in a great

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 210-11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁴ Quoted by Stalin, “Report of the Work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union” in *International Conciliation* (monthly pamphlet of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of Intercourse and Education), no. 305. New York, Dec. 1934.

¹⁵ *Religion* (International Publishing Co., N. Y.), p. 14.

majority of cases. . . . Secondly, inasmuch as the party inspects the work of government organs, organs of power . . . and not one important decision is taken by these organs without indication from the party. Thirdly, inasmuch as when plans for this or that governmental organ are being elaborated, the Communist Party gives general directions which define the aim and character of the work of these organs.”¹⁶ Incidentally, Stalin is the acknowledged dictator in Russia, not by virtue of an executive governmental post, but because he is general secretary of the Communist Party. That he pledges the party to a continuance of Marxian theory is patent from his slogan of 1934—“To remain loyal to the end to the great banner of Marx, Engels and Lenin.”¹⁷

Appreciation

To criticize Communism rationally it is quite necessary to keep in mind its philosophical beginnings, that is, its implicit acceptance of the Cartesian dichotomy between the soul and body of man. A proper, realistic doctrine on man is essential for any social system worthy of acceptance. If the fundament be wrong, the superstructure is doomed to fall.

Modern Communism, as has been pointed out, derives its ideology from Marx and Engels through Lenin. Marx and Engels subscribed to the materialism of Feuerbach, which was but a *reductio ad absurdum* of the idealism of Hegel. Hegel, in turn, followed Descartes as the father of modern philosophy, a philosophy interwoven with the subjectivism of Protestantism and anthropocentric humanism. Now we are back to the roots, the fundaments of Communism.

To fully appreciate the implications of the Cartesian-Protestant-Humanist revolution, we should bear in mind its *lack of touch with reality*. Descartes, in proposing his universal methodic doubt, posited a mind apart from the world, a mind whose only experience of sensible reality is through a body distinct and opposed. To admit such is to contradict reality. Man is not an angel driving a machine. He is a unified ego—a man, acting as one thing, and therefore, one in being. To contradict this is to admit an erroneous concept of man. This latter the Communistic theorists have done, so to share in the sins of their philosophical forebears. It is worthy of note that Plato, who

¹⁶ Quoted by Walsh, Edmund, S.J., *The Last Stand* (Boston, 1931), p. 59.

¹⁷ *International Conciliation*, p. 451.

similarly denied the substantial union of body and soul in man, taught a system of Communism which he later saw fit to repudiate because it did not fit men as they really exist. The Protestant outlook on life likewise suffers from a lack of touch with reality. While there are many good people who in their actual life deny Luther's dichotomy between faith and good works, yet the principle lives on. If one's belief has nothing to do with his actions in public life, then the practicality of that belief might well be called into question. As Gurian says of Bolshevism, "It is the inevitable product of a world for which Christianity with its transcendental orientation has become a matter of private faith which no longer influences the organization of public life."¹⁸ The charge of unreality can also be laid at the door of the humanists, with their "self-deification of humanity." To hold that man is self-sufficient, an end to himself, is, to say the least, a supposition sadly at variance with all we know of history.

The idealism and materialism which grew out of the Cartesian revolution share its lack of touch with reality. Marx, in wedding Hegel and Feuerbach, did not correct the discrepancy. Truth does not come of error. A cursory glance at some of the fundamentals of Marxian Communism will illustrate this:

1) Communistic thought is essentially dialectic; nothing is, everything is becoming. It calls into question the first principles of contradiction, of causality, of sufficient reason. Experience, on the other hand, tells us that things *are*, that there is causation, etc.

2) Upon the dialectic is posited an economic determinism which excludes free will. "If the will is free," writes Karl Kautsky, "and can shape things as it wishes, then it can also shape the direction of economic development. Then it is impossible to discover any guarantee that we are growing into Socialism."¹⁹ Yet Communism *docs* attempt to shape the direction of economic development by revolution, which requires free will. Thus "in the philosophic field the Marxist system has an inner contradiction; it represents a fatalistic and mechanistic interpretation combined with an activistic and revolutionary practice."²⁰

3) Because of the dialectic, no real final end can be ad-

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 253.

¹⁹ *Road to Power*. Quoted by Elder, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

²⁰ Jaszi, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

mitted by Communism. True, "the dictatorship of the proletariat" is hailed as the ultimate goal of man, but as yet that does not exist. Since man, in every human act, operates for an ultimate end, it is quite unreal for him to act for an end which does not have reality. Properly, then, there can be no norm of morality. Still Lenin queries: "Is there such a thing as Communist morality? Of course there is. . . . We say that our morality is wholly subordinated to the interests of the class-struggle of the proletariat."²¹ An instance of such morality may be found in the starvation of from three to four million peasants in the Ukraine several years ago, the justification being the advancement of Soviet military forces. Grain, produced by the peasants and sufficient for their wants, was confiscated by the government, sold on the foreign market, and the money procured from the sale was turned to equip the Red Army.²²

4) Moreover, Marxian collectivism is founded on an untenable supposition; namely, that in exchange absolutely equal values are sought. "It is plain that the parties to an exchange do not demand equal values in the exchange. If they did there would be no reason for exchange. Between commodities that are of equal value, and that can have no other characteristic except value, there can be no intelligent choice and there can be no purposive exchange of them."²³ With the denial of the Marxian supposition, the labor and surplus-value theory falls; and with that the right of labor to the total surplus product; and with that the proposition that forcible collectivism should be instituted to capture the surplus capital for the proletariat.

5) Lastly, Eduard Bernstein's appreciation of Marx's work, *Capital*, brings out the inconsistencies of this Bible of Communism.

". . . it repeatedly happens that he points out all the phenomena connected with a certain question, but afterwards ignores some of them and proceeds as if they did not exist. . . .

"And here we come to the main and fatal contradiction of his work. He wanted to proceed, and to a very large extent did proceed, scientifically. Nothing was to be deduced from preconceived ideas; from the observed evolutionary laws and forces of modern soci-

²¹ Quoted by Feely, R., S.J., *Morals and Moscow* (pamphlet), p. 8.

²² Cf. Chamberlin, W. H., *Russia's Iron Age* (Boston, 1935), p. 82-88.

²³ Elder, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

ety alone were conclusions to be drawn. And yet the final conclusion of the work . . . is a preconceived idea; it is the announcement of a state of society logically opposed to the given one. Imperceptibly the dialectical movement of *ideas* is substituted for the dialectical movement of facts, and the real movement of facts is only considered so far as is compatible with the former. Science is violated in the service of speculation. . . ."²⁴

What of the future of Marxian Communism?²⁵ In Gurian's opinion, "The gulf between theory and practice, the denial therefore of the fundamental principles of their unity, will be revealed by the social reality. Its existence at present is cloaked by the tasks of social transformation, such as the industrialising of Russia. But one day it will be visible to everybody. It will, then be evident that the Utopia which has served as a justification for a government based on force was misconceived, an artificial construction which has produced results completely different from those which, in virtue of its claim to represent the necessary significance of the historical process, it professed to yield."²⁶

In the beginning of this study, Dostoyevsky's narration of Raskolnikov's dream about the "terrible new strange plague that had come to Europe from the depths of Asia" was instanced as a figure of Communism. There is still another analogy that may be taken from *Crime and Punishment*. Raskolnikov brought death to two of his fellow creatures; Communism has brought it to many more. But the homicide, atheist that he was, found rescue in the little Christian sinner, Sonia. Would that her counsel were heeded by Communism today! "Go to the cross roads, bow down to the people, kiss the earth, for you have sinned against it too, and say aloud to the whole world, 'I am a murderer'." Then it might be said of Communism as it was written of the reformed Raskolnikov: "Life had stepped

²⁴ "Marx," in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th Edition, Vol. XVII, p. 810.

²⁵ E. I. Watkin would use the Marxian dialectic against itself, to show that the outcome will be the ideal realism of the scholastics. "THUS THE METAPHYSICAL DIALECTIC MUST PASS FROM THE THESIS, DIALECTICAL IDEALISM (HEGELIANISM), THROUGH THE ANTI-THESIS, DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM (MARXISM), TO THE SYNTHESIS, DIALECTICAL IDEAL REALISM." (Capitals his). *Men and Tendencies* (London, 1937), p. 281.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 231.

into the place of theory and something quite different would work itself out in his mind."

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