

THE GENESIS OF COMMUNISM

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DOSTOYEVSKY, the great Russian novelist whom Karl Pfleger numbers among his *Wrestlers With Christ*, once penned a very strange paragraph. In the epilogue to *Crime and Punishment*, he relates the dream of Raskolnikov, the reformer murderer.

. . . . He dreamt that the whole world was condemned to a terrible, new strange plague that had come to Europe from the depths of Asia. . . . Some new sorts of microbes were attacking the bodies of men, but these microbes were endowed with intelligence and will. Men attacked by them became at once mad and furious. But never had men considered themselves so intellectual and so completely in possession of the truth as these sufferers, never had they considered their decisions, their scientific conclusions, their moral convictions so infallible. . . . They did not know how to judge and could not agree what to consider evil and what good; they did not know whom to blame, whom to justify. Men killed each other in a sort of senseless spite. . .

Though only a dream, one cannot but wonder whether Dostoyevsky foresaw, with the keen vision often vouchsafed to genius, the advent of atheistic Communism. At least, there is a remarkable analogy between the two. It is true that "the depths of Asia" appears confusing.¹ But then, Kipling maintained that Russia should be considered the most western of Eastern nations rather than the most easterly nation of the West. At any rate, in November, 1917, the world learned that the Bolshevik Party under the leadership of Lenin had assumed control of Great Russia. The avowed intention of the revolutionaries was to establish a Communistic state according to the Marxian ideology. A sanguine world observed: it will soon destroy itself with such a fantastic philosophy.

But whether one likes it or not, the last twenty years have not satisfied that prediction. Today 160,000,000 people inhabit-

¹ A recent book, *The Proletariat*, by Goetz A. Briefs (New York, 1937), puts forth powerful arguments to show that the principles underlying Communism are Eastern in origin. Another well-written work dealing with the Asiatic aspect of the modern revolutionary movement is *Defence of the West*, by Henri Massis (New York, 1928).

ing one sixth of the earth's surface live under the "hammer and sickle" of Communism, while other scattered and expectant millions await the day of their deliverance from the bourgeois yoke. Communism, then, with all its mitigations, is a fact. How explain it? "How is it possible," to quote the words of Pope Pius XI, "that such a system, long since rejected scientifically and now proved erroneous by experience, how is it, We ask, that such a system could spread so rapidly in all parts of the world? *The explanation lies in the fact that too few have been able to grasp the nature of Communism.*"² Despite the fact that an attempt to limit philosophical currents in definite periods and men leaves much unsaid, it would seem that a study of the philosophical genesis of Communism will help considerably in ascertaining its nature.

For the sake of convenience, this study will embrace two parts: I. *The Antecedents of Communism*; II. *Marxian Communism Itself*, which may be defined as

a materialistic philosophy of life which advocates the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat in all countries throughout the world by violent revolution or by any means which may be deemed necessary in order to ultimately arrive at and preserve a classless society, in which there shall be no private ownership, and in which all property shall be vested in the community as a whole, and all labor and human activities organized for the common benefit by a centralized group of workers' representatives.³

I. The Antecedents of Communism

In this period, extending from the time of the Renaissance to the era of Marx and Engels, five major influences can be detected: Humanism, Protestantism, Cartesianism, Hegelian Idealism, and the Materialism of Feuerbach.

A. Humanism

By Humanism is meant the Renaissance discontent with a decadent Scholasticism, with the domination of ecclesiastical powers in life and with theological thought, which discontent manifested itself in a tendency to minimize the supernatural in the interests of a fuller human life, a life expanded by classical studies, the geographical extension of Europe, scientific discoveries, the opening of the New World, and the power of incipient capitalism. Such humanism disrupted the real teleology

² Encyclical: *Atheistic Communism*, March 19, 1937. Italics mine.

³ Feely, Raymond, S.J., *Just What Is Communism?* (Paulist Press), p. 5.

of human affairs. It enslaved man in the name of freedom. As Jacques Maritain expresses it: "To propose to man no more than what is human, Aristotle remarked, is to betray man, to will his unhappiness, for by the principal part of himself, the spirit, he is called to something greater than a merely human life."⁴ "The radical fault of anthropocentric humanism was that it was anthropocentric, not that it was humanism."⁵

The great effect of humanism on later thought was this: it emphasized politics, economics and the natural sciences without relating them to theological and metaphysical knowledge, as was the wont of scholasticism. Deprived of a directive norm based on ultimates, the former sciences lost proper orientation, so much so that later centuries were to witness metaphysics being replaced by economics as the science of ultimates. Humanism also revived, unhappily, the "becoming" philosophy of Heraclitus, which was to gain currency through modern philosophers such as Hegel and his school. More immediately, Renaissance humanism, with its insistence on the autonomy of human life apart from any external direction and with its penchant for secularization, paved the way for the Protestant Revolt against Church authority and property.

B. Protestantism

In the sixteenth century, Western civilization was rent by the religious revolt of Luther's initiation. Justification by faith alone stood as one of his cardinal doctrines. Based upon the distinction between reason as a function of the flesh and faith as a function of the spirit, and positing the Pauline conflict between the "law of the flesh" and the "law of the spirit," this doctrine dug the ground for the growth of psychological dualism.⁶ Man, instead of being considered an integrated personality, became but a battleground of two opposed forces, body and soul.

From the Lutheran religion of the spirit followed the denial of visible Church authority and the dichotomy between faith and good works. With regard to the former—the negation of a visible society exercising spiritual jurisdiction over man—its disastrous results were soon manifested in a multitude of con-

⁴ Quoted by Vann, Gerald O.P., "Integral Humanism" in *Blackfriars*, Vol. XVIII, no. 200 (November, 1936), p. 809.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 814.

⁶ Cf. Turner, Wm., *History of Philosophy* (Boston, 1903), p. 439.

tradictory creeds posing as religions. Strangely enough, modern men find a remedy in the new "infallible" authority of the totalitarian state. Similarly, the doctrine, "Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe more boldly still," affected the social Occident profoundly. No longer were works of charity necessary for a living faith. The "reformers" destroyed the charitable corporations, religious and civil, founded by the Church for the laboring classes. The dissolution of the monastic orders and the guilds robbed the workers of their collective unity. "Henceforth the benefactions of the convents and civil institutions were to be replaced by the poor laws; and, deprived also of the strength they had found in the union fostered by their guilds, the people were left to the shift of agreeing individually for wages with those who had money. Thus two immense dangers to society arose; namely, pauperism, the necessary result of the poor laws, and the struggle of labor against capital. . . . This ominous social revolution . . . has finally added political to social hatred by the extension of the franchise, and *necessitated* the advent of Socialism and Communism."⁷

Hence, when Marx condemns religion for fostering pauperism and labor conflict, Protestantism is the logical culprit. Likewise, in his opposition to industrial capitalism which produced for profit instead of use, Marx hit at what might be termed economic Protestantism. Just as theological faith sufficed without good works, so in capitalism, economic faith (credit) oft-times operated with little or no real wealth or work behind it.

In summary, this much can be noted: Protestantism 1) by cleaving the functions of flesh and spirit, opened the way for the Cartesian dualism in man; 2) caused pauperism and class antagonism by the destruction of the orders and the guilds; 3) promoted individualistic capitalism with its *laissez-faire* in economics and liberalism in politics, which are naught but private judgment supreme in business and government. Marx was to oppose all of these evils in his time.

C. Cartesianism

Descartes taught that man's body and soul were united accidentally; the soul is as an angel piloting the bodily machine. Primarily a mathematician, Descartes neglected the fact of common experience; namely, that man acts as a unified ego.

⁷ Thebaud, A.J., S.J., "Socialism," in *Amer. Cath. Quarterly Review*, Vol. iv, No. 15 (July, 1879), p. 446.

Mathematics abstracts from reality, and thus Descartes confused the two principles of man's being with two beings. It is through this neglect of common experience, a neglect further accentuated by his universal methodic doubt, that he initiated the unreal philosophizing so characteristic of his followers.

The teaching of the dichotomy between soul and body gave rise to great controversy as to the nature of knowledge. How the body with its senses could subserve the intellectual faculties of the soul, when both were antithetical, became an enigma. Descartes' philosophical children inclined to extremes. One school claimed that all knowledge consists in purely subjective thought, which is idealism; the other maintained that knowledge embraces sense perceptions alone, which is materialism. The idealists conceived man as a sort of creative angel, or god. The materialists reckoned him a machine. Both opinions exercised great influence on Marx and Engels.

D. Hegelian Idealism

Lenin once wrote, "without Hegel, Marx's *Capital* is unintelligible."⁸ "We must make the Marxian interpretation of Hegel's dialectic in a materialist sense the foundation of our work."⁹ Hegel taught a dialectic idealism. "The free act of thought consists in placing itself at the point where it is for itself, and thereby itself produces and makes its object."¹⁰ That in this he follows the spirit of the Cartesian period may be inferred from his observations on that era. ". . . the leading principle is thought, the thought which originates from itself, that interiority which is a universal feature of Christianity and the distinctively Protestant principle. It is now the principle universally admitted, to hold fast to interiority as such, rejecting, and regarding as impertinent and lifeless, externality and authority."¹¹

This subjectivism, this unwarranted independence of external reality, in Hegelian philosophy also carries over into the teachings of Marx and Engels. It should not be forgotten. To explain the apparent variations of matter, which the senses cannot but note, Hegel posited his dialectic in three stages: thesis,

⁸ Quoted by Gurian, W., *Bolshevism: Theory and Practice* (New York, 1934), p. 209.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

¹⁰ Quoted by Przywra, E., S.J., "St. Augustine and the Modern World," in *A Monument to St. Augustine* (London, 1930), p. 265.

¹¹ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 251.

antithesis, and synthesis. Thought (thesis) generates its negation (antithesis); then the two combine in a higher unity (synthesis), which forms the thesis for another cycle of creative thought. This evolution is eternal; nothing is stable. There are no universal first principles. "Nothing is, everything is becoming." It is Heraclitus all over again.¹²

As one can readily surmise, Hegelianism provides for no fixed standards save the self. If Hegel provides for religion, it is a specious concession which his idealism logically destroys. Man, not God, creates reality. He identifies the state with the Absolute, calling it "the Incarnation of the Divine Idea as it exists on earth."¹³ "The state is the realized ethical idea or ethical spirit. . . . It is the objective spirit, and the individual has his truth, real existence, and ethical status only in being a member of it."¹⁴ It is not a long step from such teaching to the totalitarian state, the absolute without God.

A very important element of Hegel's speculation is the dialectics of history. To him, history is the process of reason as spirit. Three stages comprise the evolution: oneness (thesis), expansion (antithesis), and concentration (synthesis). Marx saw in such a theory the justification of the struggle for the socialist state, which was, in the materialistic concept of history, to be the ultimate stage in the development of human society. Primitive Communism had begun the cycle; Industrial Capitalism antithetically provided the necessary expansion; finally, Industrial Communism would synthesize society. Marx, it is true, qualified his adherence to Hegelian idealism by teaching the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought; yet he clung tenaciously to the evolutionary (and contradictory) Absolute. "Hegelianism," says Soloviev, "as a system absolute in its own sphere, is completely closed within itself, and cannot be rejected or developed in part. The only way to escape from it is to recognize the onesidedness or limitations of its entire sphere or of the principle itself, that is to say, the principle of a wholly separated understanding in the sphere of pure logic."¹⁵

¹² Cf. Elder, Benedict, *A Study in Socialism* (St. Louis, 1915), pp. 27-8.

¹³ Quoted by Dawson, C., *Progress and Religion* (London, 1929), p. 29.

¹⁴ Quoted by Haas, F. J., *Man and Society* (New York, 1930), pp. 56-7.

¹⁵ Cf. LaFarge, John, S.J., "The Philosophical Basis of Communism" in *Proceedings of 9th Annual Meeting of American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 1933, p. 52.

E. *The Materialism of Feuerbach (1804-72)*

Marx and Engels, both Hegelian students, *were forced* to recognize the one-sidedness of Hegel's idealism. Engels claimed it savored of "the fantastical survival of the belief in the existence of a supra-mundane creator."¹⁶ Armed with the Hegelian dialectic, he and Marx subscribed to the materialism of the contemporary Ludwig Feuerbach. But how could idealism lead to materialism? "In Soloviev's view, empirical, as opposed to a purely idealistic, philosophy, arose from this *reductio ad absurdum* of Hegel; and the door was open for scientific materialism. Hegel's theory of knowledge, in his view, led by rigid consequence to the doctrine that the source of knowledge was wholly outside of myself; hence the foundation for all knowledge was purely inductive empiricism. Pure materialism, therefore, was the natural consequence of Hegelianism."¹⁷

The attempt to despiritualize reality, begun in the analytic geometry of Descartes, culminated in Feuerbach. This materialist denied the reality of mind as distinct from matter, which matter did not evolve, but merely varied. Marx and Engels, however, rejected this immutableism, substituting the evolutionary dialectic of Hegel. They held with Feuerbach that matter is the eternal, all-inclusive principle of the universe; but they adopted Hegel's view that reality was in a constant process of evolution.¹⁸ As Marx wrote in the preface to *Capital*, "Hegel's dialectic is standing on its head and it must be turned right side up again to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell."¹⁹

While the influences mentioned above expose some phases of the genesis of Communism up to the advent of scientific Socialism, they do not by any means complete the picture. Space permits but suggestions relative to several others. Marx was, unhappily, "a man of his time," subject to the many cross-currents in the philosophical world of his day. As a boy in Germany he was drilled by his father in the doctrines of the French encyclopedists; later he contacted Hegelianism and Feuerbach. Exiled in France, the parental influence reasserted itself and he delved into the naturalism of Rousseau. Marx's notes on *The Origin of the Family*, for instance, show that he held much in

¹⁶ Quoted by Elder, *op. cit.*, pp. 29, 30.

¹⁷ LaFarge, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

¹⁸ Cf. Elder, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁹ Quoted by Elder, *ibid.*, p. 32.

common with the French socialist, whose essay on the *Origin of Inequality among Men* sought to show how, in the beginning, vanity and greed had found lodgement in the hearts of "simple savages;" how the strongest had fenced off plots of land for themselves and forced the weak to respect their property, and that the right of private property had subjected all the human race "to labor, servitude and misery."²⁰

Marx, again banished, resided in England for the remainder of his life. The British school of political philosophy was not without its Marxian sympathies. Witness Hobbes' dictum: "Every man is a wolf to every other man." Then there was the labor theory of Locke; namely, that the finished product of man's labor belongs entirely to him, a theory which characterizes the Marxian idea of distribution. In natural science, Marxism borrows from Darwin. Engels maintained: "Darwin dealt the metaphysical concept of Nature the heaviest blow by his proof that all organic human beings, plants, animals, and man himself, are the products of a process of evolution going on through millions of years."²¹ Enrico Ferri, a Socialist authority, avers: "Darwinism has demonstrated that the entire mechanism of animal evolution may be reduced to the struggle for existence between individuals of the same species on the one hand, and between each species and the whole world of living beings. In the same way, all the machinery of social evolution has been reduced by Marxian socialism to the law of the struggle between classes."²²

In summary, this sketch of the antecedents of Communism will be helpful in studying the nature of the revolutionary teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Scientific Socialism, as it was termed in the last century, was not merely a bubble on the stream of philosophic thought. It was the climax of a tendency dating over a period of three centuries. Some of the contributing factors having been mentioned, the phenomenon itself will be more intelligible. Cartesianism, aided by Humanism and given theological confirmation by Protestantism, had proposed a revolutionary (and decidedly unreal) concept of man—an angel driving a machine, an accidental union of opposing powers, body and soul. Hegel's idealism went to one extreme, making man a

²⁰ Cf. Hayes, C.J., *Political and Cultural History of Modern Europe* (New York, 1932), Vol. 1, p. 542.

²¹ Quoted by Goldstein-Avery, *Bolshevism: Its Cure* (Boston, 1919), p. 59.

²² Quoted *ibid.*, p. 305.

creative angel or god. Feuerbach, on the other hand, looked on man as a machine. Finally, Marx attempted to wed the two, conceiving man as a creative machine, a human god, creator of an economic heaven on earth, yet paradoxically subject to the laws of historical determinism.²³

²³ Note: The second and concluding part of this article will appear in the June issue.

GIFT

SEBASTIAN CARLSON, O.P.

To Someone very dear
And very loving,
To Someone very near
Though far away—
To One oft bright with smiles,
Too oft with teardrops,
Go, roses, go! Be kissed
By her, and say:

Come, dear, too much you praise
My blossoms fairness;
Turn now that thoughtful gaze
From bloom to thorn.
You cannot pluck the red,
Red rose of Gladness
Unless your hands by Pain
Are pierced and torn.

“You cannot kiss the cheek
O Truth and Beauty,
Nor find the Good you seek
Except by loss!
No joy is born, save wombed
And throed by sorrow,
No joy can live, save dying
On a Cross!”