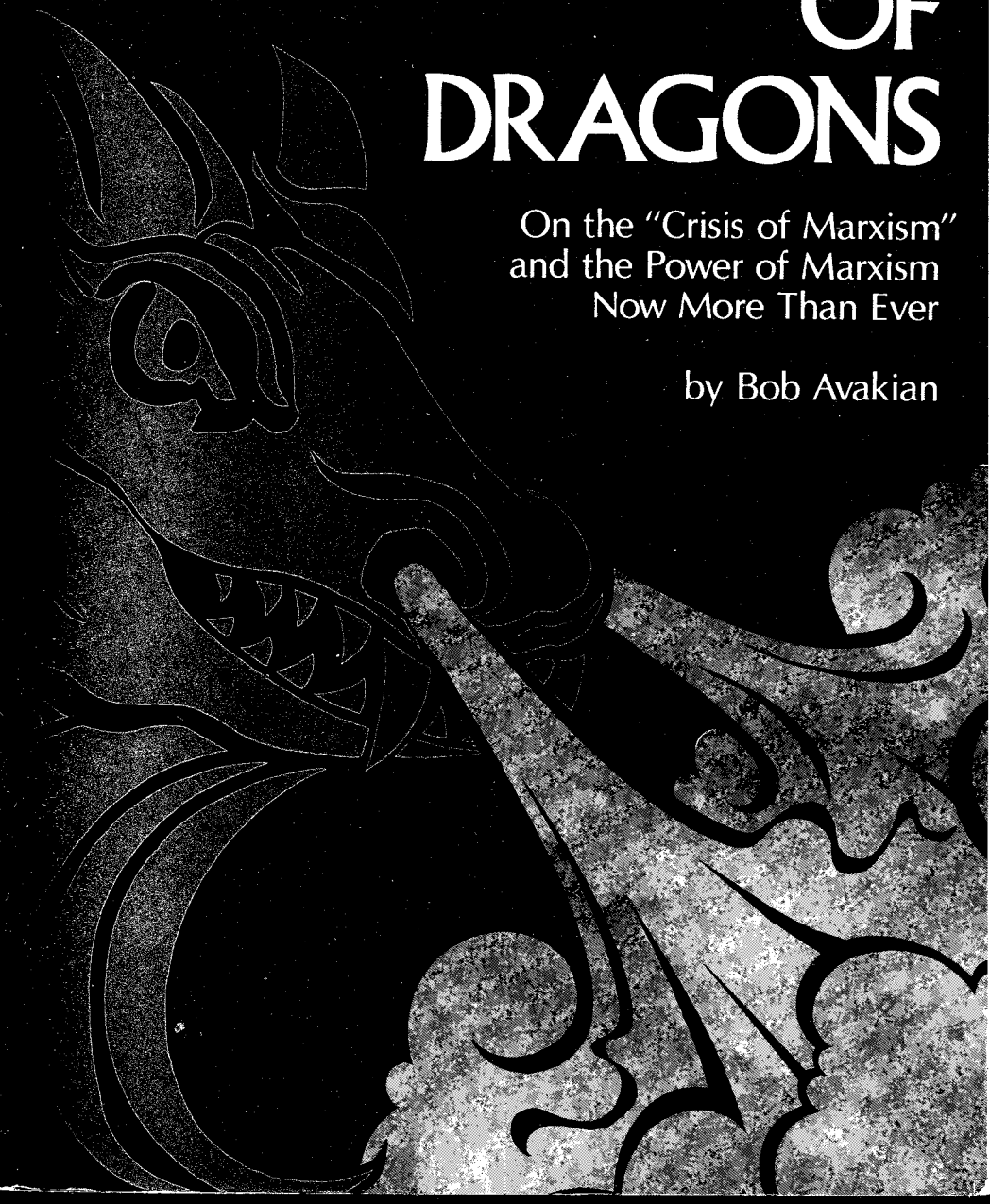


# FOR A HARVEST OF DRAGONS

On the "Crisis of Marxism"  
and the Power of Marxism  
Now More Than Ever

by Bob Avakian





**An Essay Marking  
the 100th Anniversary of Marx's Death**

"We, in our turn, must also understand the specific features and tasks of the new era. Let us not imitate those sorry Marxists of whom Marx said: 'I have sown dragon's teeth and harvested fleas.'"

V. I. Lenin

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"Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells. . . . It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return put on its trial, each time more threateningly, the existence of the entire bourgeois society. In these crises a great part not only of the existing products, but also of the previously created productive forces, are periodically destroyed. In these crises there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity — the epidemic of over-production. Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed. And why? Because there is too much civilization, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce. . . . The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the

conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented."<sup>1</sup>

It is one hundred years since the death of Karl Marx, and despite the many times during that period (as well as before, during Marx's lifetime) that the bourgeoisie and its apologists have slandered and distorted him and declared Marx defeated, disproven or *dépassé*, who can deny the profound ring of truth to the description of the basic contradiction of capitalist society and its eruption into crises in the above passage from the pathbreaking *Communist Manifesto* written by Marx and Engels? Indeed, in this year 1983, who would even attempt to deny that "Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property" is in the midst of extensive and destructive crisis? The entire old world — and today, even more than in Marx's time, the system of "free enterprise" represents the old world — is engulfed and thrashing in crisis, not only in the fundamental sphere of the economy but in all other spheres as well — political, social, moral, ideological. Darkening clouds and louder rumblings of war — a world war with destruction unprecedented in history — loom and echo before us, while outbreaks of upheaval rock societies in various parts of the world and reverberate throughout. Where today is the politician or pundit who will openly champion or defend the capitalist system and at the same time speak without grave concern about the present situation and with confidence about the future?

Yet in these times there seems to be as well a real, a profound crisis of Marxism. The countries ruled by self-proclaimed Marxists are themselves racked by crisis — with peculiar features but not fundamentally different than the crisis in the avowedly capitalist countries. On the surface at least, it appears that the camp of Marxism is marked by disarray and dissension. Different denominations of Marxists fight among themselves

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), pp. 39-41.

over seemingly obscure points of doctrine, while in the Holy Russian Empire Marxism has been reduced to a state religion.

And it is true that, in desperately hanging on and even staging comebacks, capitalism has shown a kind of grotesque, vampire-like resilience beyond what was expected by Marx. Certain major aspects of the capitalist system, including the dynamics and character of capitalist crisis, are today different than when Marx, for the first time, forged a scientific analysis of them. But in fact, all this represents a heightening of the basic contradiction of capitalism, a further propulsion of the whole process through which this system moves toward its own elimination. The great events and changes in the world in the one hundred years since Marx's death have not refuted but confirmed and deepened both the fundamental analysis made by Marx and the final outcome he was able to foresee on the basis of that analysis.

Despite the very real reversals and setbacks suffered by the Marxist movement in recent times — most especially the wrecking of a genuine socialist camp by the revisionists who seized power in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death and two decades later the reactionary coup and capitalist restoration in China following the death of Mao Tsetung — and although there is no genuine Marxist state at this particular time, it remains true that in a very large part of the world the ruling class, because of its historical identification and its present-day necessity, has to profess Marxism and proclaim it the ruling ideology in order to maintain itself as the ruling class and pursue its class interests. Marxism not only has adherents in all parts of the world but is in fact the most widely proclaimed ideology in the world as a whole, even while it is perhaps today the most misunderstood and distorted — by many of its apparent upholders as well as its deadly enemies, by those who seek to be its executioners *and* by those who would act as its High Priests. Though in many respects backhanded, even perverse, all this is nonetheless a testimony to the power of Marxism, indeed to its invincibility.

Marxism is not a utopian scheme — unworkable at best, "a nice idea on paper but never working out in practice," mon-

strous at worst, as its opponents variously accuse. It is a scientific worldview and method leading to clear-cut political understanding and pointing to the emancipation of the exploited class in modern, bourgeois society — the proletariat — and through this the abolition of all exploiting systems and the emancipation of humanity as a whole from inhuman conditions. "The Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism has two outstanding characteristics," wrote Mao Tsetung. "One is its class nature: it openly avows that dialectical materialism is in the service of the proletariat. The other is its practicality: it emphasizes the dependence of theory on practice, emphasizes that theory is based on practice and in turn serves practice."<sup>2</sup> Mao added that "dialectical materialism is universally true because it is impossible for anyone to escape from its domain in his practice."<sup>3</sup> As an all-encompassing *science*, and in contrast to all religion and superstition and dogma of any kind, Marxism "has in no way exhausted truth but ceaselessly opens up roads to the knowledge of the truth in the course of practice."<sup>4</sup> In sum, as Lenin so succinctly put it: "The Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true."<sup>5</sup>

In the world situation today, one hundred years after the death of Marx, the truth and omnipotence of Marxism not only remains a fact but assumes immense importance — now more than ever. What are the essential aspects of Marxism, what have been the major changes in the world since Marx's time, how have Marxist principles developed in relation to these changes and what is the application of these principles to the decisive questions today — it is these subjects that this essay will address.

<sup>2</sup> Mao Tsetung, *On Practice, Selected Works (SW)*, 5 Volumes (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), Vol. 1, p. 297.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 307-308.

<sup>5</sup> V.I. Lenin, "The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism," *Marx Engels Marxism* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1978), p. 68.

## I. Marxism, The Historic Breakthrough; Historical Materialism, The Pivotal Point

### 1. The basic principle of historical materialism

"A youth from El Salvador put it this way: 'When I was 12 years old in El Salvador, I remember looking at all the papers I could, trying to find out why people worked so hard but stayed so poor, trying to understand what was happening in other countries. . . .'"<sup>6</sup> Down through the course of human history the oppressed masses have sought the answer to basic questions like these. So, too, philosophers and political theorists of various kinds have attempted to determine the basis for the most just, or most rational, form of society. But in the one case as in the other, they remained for centuries unable to arrive at the essence of the problem — not only in formulating the answers but even in posing the questions. It was only with the development of Marxism that this problem was fundamentally solved, for the first time.

As I wrote in another work, however, Marxism "did not, of course, spring full-blown from the head of Marx. As Mao was reported to have jokingly asked, when Marx was a very young man did he study any Marxism?"<sup>7</sup> And naturally Marxism did not suddenly come to Marx one day as a divine revelation. Marxism was forged by Marx, in close collaboration with Engels, on the basis of critically assimilating and synthesizing elements of philosophy, political theory, political economy and other fields, including scientific discovery, in close connection with and in an overall sense on the basis of profound developments in the society of their time — in production and science and in the class struggle within the relatively recently emerged capitalist society. Capitalism was, then especially, extremely dynamic and continually giving rise to dramatic, far-reaching change and at the

<sup>6</sup> *Revolutionary Worker* (Chicago: RCP Publications), No. 195, March 4, 1983, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Bob Avakian, *Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions* (Chicago: RCP Publications, 1979), p. 132.

same time intense and often complex conflict involving the proletariat and the bourgeoisie as antagonists but also on occasions the proletariat and bourgeoisie as objective allies against the old landed aristocracy, the monarchy, a reactionary foreign foe representing more backward society, etc.

Out of all this, the crucial thing was that the more the capitalist system developed, with its characteristic modern, large-scale production — as compared to the small-scale, scattered productive forces of previous society — and the more the production relations and corresponding class relations characteristic of capitalism emerged to the forefront, the more possible it became to grasp the essence not only of capitalist society itself but of all previous society and indeed of the basic thread of development running throughout the history of human society — of humanity's interaction with nature and with itself in and through society. Marx and Engels themselves gave powerful expression to this point in the *Communist Manifesto*:

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. . . .

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation. . . .

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind.<sup>8</sup>

Mao Tsetung has concisely summed up the basic point here:

For a very long period in history, men were necessarily confined to a one-sided understanding of the history of society because, for one thing, the bias of the exploiting classes always distorted history and, for another, the small scale of production limited man's outlook. It was not until the modern proletariat emerged along with immense forces of production (large-scale industry) that man was able to acquire a comprehensive, historical understanding of the development of society and turn this knowledge into a science, the science of Marxism.<sup>9</sup>

This comprehensive historical understanding of the development of society is historical materialism. It is the pivotal point in Marxism. Historical materialism is based on and reveals the truth that mankind's productive activity in society is the most fundamental human activity, the basis not only for the production and reproduction of human life itself but for all of human society. This understanding is opposed to the prevailing *idealist* misconception in present-day society, as well as all previous society, which has attributed the decisive, determining role in shaping society to political institutions and ideas — especially the ideas of the "great men" of the ruling class of the age — and has viewed the economic activity and relations of people in society as secondary, as extensions of these ideas and institutions. Historical materialism, in recognizing and bringing to light the overall and ultimately decisive role of productive activity and the mode of production in any given society, in identifying these as the foundation upon which arise politics and ideol-

<sup>8</sup> Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 33, 35, 36-37.

<sup>9</sup> Mao, *On Practice*, SW, Vol. 1, p. 296.



ogy, has inverted the idealist misconception of reality and stood reality on its feet (to paraphrase Engels).<sup>10</sup>

But that is not all. Production is not only mankind's basic activity, it is also a dynamic activity: in the course of production new productive forces — new instruments and new skills and knowledge that can be used in production — are constantly being developed. Further, in carrying out production, as Marx pointed out, people enter into relationship not only with nature but with each other as well. This is an extremely important point — it is impossible for production to be carried out in the abstract, without that production taking place through definite *production relations*. And, as a basic rule, those production relations must and will correspond to the level of development and character of the productive forces at hand in society at the given time. On the other hand, the production relations, corresponding in this way to the productive forces, are the economic basis for the superstructure of politics and political institutions, ideology in the broadest sense, including culture, etc. After a certain point in the development of the productive forces, carried out (in all societies prior to socialism) spontaneously — that is, without any conscious thought as to the political and other changes that will be called forth by such development of production instruments, techniques, etc. — the production relations and their corresponding superstructure will no longer tend to further the development of the productive forces as much as to restrain this development. The productive forces will, so to speak, rebel through people against the relations of production and superstructure — that is, the groups in society whose interests are most directly connected with the further development of the productive forces and the establishment of new production relations and a new superstructure in place of the old ones will organize and lead struggle against those whose interests lie in defending the old relations of production and superstructure —

<sup>10</sup> See Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Marx and Engels, *Selected Works (MESW)*, 3 Volumes (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), Vol. 3, p. 362.

and therefore in restraining the development of the productive forces. Mao Tsetung spoke graphically to this:

When the productive forces have developed, there is bound to be a revolution. The productive forces consist of two factors: one is man and the other tools. Tools are made by men. When tools call for a revolution, they will speak through men. . . .<sup>11</sup>

The underlying purpose of a revolution — more or less consciously understood by its leaders and participants — is to change the economic system and liberate the productive forces from the now outmoded production relations; but a revolution takes place, and can only take place, in the realm of the superstructure. A revolution in its essence is the forcible overthrow of the old political power protecting the old economic system and its replacement by a new political power representing a new economic system (new production relations) that will unleash the productive forces. And such a revolution will, sooner or later, be called forth once the productive forces have advanced to the point where they have outgrown the old production relations and superstructure. This dynamic, and dialectical, process is the basic driving force running through the development of human society.

This process has, since the dissolution of primitive classless society thousands of years ago, taken the form of the struggle between classes, and in particular between the classes representing the old and the new production relations respectively. Classes are social groupings defined by their position and role in the production relations of society: by their relationship to the means of production — that is, whether or not they are owners of means of production and what importance their means of production have in the overall economic system if they do in fact own some — by their role in the social division of labor and by their relative share in the distribution of society's production, which will be basically determined by their relation to the

<sup>11</sup> Mao, "Speech at the Second Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China," *SW*, Vol. 5, p. 338.

means of production. Different levels of development of the productive forces will be characterized by different production relations and different class structures, and class struggles. After a certain point, when the production relations are brought into antagonism with the productive forces because of the development of the latter, the class struggle in society will sooner or later erupt into a revolution, an all-out military struggle for political power between the contending classes, which as a general rule will eventually result — if not in the first attempt then in a subsequent revolutionary collision — in the victory of the class representing the new production relations corresponding, for the time, to the development of the productive forces.

It is all this that Marx and Engels are summing up when they write that (since the emergence of classes out of primitive communal society), "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."<sup>12</sup>

In another work, Marx summarized in both a sweeping and concentrated way what he called "the basic principle of my studies" — the principle of historical materialism — the historical process which this principle is drawn from and the outcome of that process:

In the social production of their existence, men enter into definite, necessary relations, which are independent of their will, namely, relations of production corresponding to a determinate stage of development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which there arises a legal and political superstructure and to which there correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life-process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary it is their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or — what is merely a legal

<sup>12</sup> Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 32.

expression for the same thing — with the property relations within the framework of which they have hitherto operated. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. At that point an era of social revolution begins. With the change in the economic foundation the whole immense superstructure is more slowly or more rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic, in short, ideological, forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such an epoch of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of production. . . . The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production — antagonistic not in the sense of an individual antagonism but of an antagonism growing out of the social conditions of existence of individuals; but the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society simultaneously create the material conditions for the solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society therefore closes with this social formation.<sup>13</sup>

## ***2. Historical materialism as the extension of dialectical materialism to society and history***

"The great basic question of all philosophy, especially of more recent philosophy," wrote Engels, "is that concerning the relation of thinking and being," or more generally of ideas (or spirit) and matter. He noted:

The answers which the philosophers gave to this question split them into two great camps. Those who asserted the

<sup>13</sup> Marx, PREFACE AND INTRODUCTION TO *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976), pp. 3-5.

primacy of spirit to nature and, therefore, in the last instance, assumed world creation in some form or other . . . comprised the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded nature as primary, belong to the various schools of materialism.<sup>14</sup>

On the surface, it might seem obvious that matter is primary over ideas — that the external world of nature both exists independently of human beings and their ideas and in fact is the ultimate source of those ideas. For example, everyday objects, such as trees, rivers, mountains, and so on, do not begin existing or cease existing depending on whether a particular person (or people generally) are thinking of them. The fact remains, however, that not only historically but in present-day bourgeois society, it is not materialism but idealism — in one form or another and in the final analysis, even if elements of materialism have been "mixed in" with the idealism — that has been and is the ruling philosophical principle. This is, to a significant degree — especially in modern society with its tremendous advances in science over all previous ages — for *political* reasons: idealism, not so much in "pure philosophical form" but in popularized and also in ritualized forms (including religion, of course), serves the interests of the ruling class in keeping the oppressed classes stupefied, mystified and subjugated. But it is also true that the realm of philosophy itself plays an important role in society, in the actions of individuals, and still more importantly, of social classes or groups, and that in this realm the "common sense" rejection of idealism does not stand up, either in the spontaneous thinking of people or in debate and confrontation between opposing philosophical schools or camps.

Engels also pointed out in *Ludwig Feuerbach* that "we simply cannot get away from the fact that everything that sets men acting must find its way through their brains"<sup>15</sup> and that the thinking of people assumes a relatively independent life of its own, not related directly or mechanically ("one-to-one") with the

<sup>14</sup> Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, MESW, Vol. 3, pp. 345, 346.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352.

material world and the changes in that world material, outside of the individual. Thus, "The influences of the external world upon man express themselves in his brain, are reflected therein as feelings, thoughts, impulses, volitions — in short, as 'ideal tendencies,' and in this form become 'ideal powers.'"<sup>16</sup> Although everything that exists is matter in motion — and this includes thought — and although much more is understood about the material processes involved in thought than in Engels' time, ideas *appear* to have an independent, nonmaterial existence. This itself contributes to the influence of idealism.

All idealism is forced, to one degree or another and in one form or another, to "concede" certain things to materialism, since in fact matter does exist and exists moreover independently of human beings, their thoughts and their societies. And the greater the advance in scientific discovery, the greater the "concessions" that idealism is compelled to make. But so long as there is an objective basis in society for idealism — and this objective basis continues to exist even in modern society because it remains divided into classes and the social relations continue to distort and obscure what is fundamentally involved in society, in nature and in the relation between the two — so long will idealism "incorporate" discoveries made by science, changes in society and in people's thinking into an overall idealist framework. For example, a basic tenet of the Christian religion up until about four centuries ago was that the earth resided at the center of the universe, that the sun and other observed celestial bodies revolved around it and that this was ordained and regulated by God. The first people who made breakthroughs in discovering that this was not the case and in advancing mankind's understanding of the earth's actual relation to other bodies in space were brutally persecuted by the Catholic Church — Galileo, who was "shown the instruments of torture" in order to get him to recant his declaration of such discoveries, was a prime and tragic example. But once this discovery could no longer be denied and suppressed, it did not mean an end to

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Christianity: Christian doctrine was simply "reinterpreted" in various ways to adjust to the uncomfortable fact that the real world (or universe) did not conform to "Genesis." Similarly, it has also been a basic tenet of this same religion that God has created all life and that only God, and specifically not man, can create life; but recently proteins, the building blocks of life, have been synthetically created by man. (Interestingly, one of the big breakthroughs in this came in China, when it was a socialist country under the leadership of Mao Tsetung and when science, so we are told today, was being neglected and ruined by putting revolution in command.) But, again, Christianity and religion in general have not been abolished by this, they have adjusted to it.

So, too, not only religion but idealism in general must reckon and does reckon with the fact of everyday life that people get impressions or images in their minds of objects outside themselves and further that they are frequently capable of acting upon and changing these objects. What idealism will deny in one form or another, however, is that these objects exist entirely independently of the people perceiving them (including the fact that they would exist even if there were no people to perceive them — and that matter does exist today and has in the past existed where in fact there are no people and no human observation of this matter) and that the impressions or images in the human mind are derived from these independently existing objects, *and from no other source*. Instead, idealism will variously argue that these objects are an extension of the person's mind who has formed these impressions or images of them; that the only existing reality is the image or impression and that there is no basis to assert, or at least to prove, the existence of the objects themselves independently of the impressions or images in the mind of the "beholder"; that where there is no human observation or perception there is also no basis to prove the existence of any material reality (remember the question commonly posed: if a tree falls in the forest and there is no one there to hear it, does it actually make a sound? — which could be extended to ask: is there really a tree, or a forest?); and/or that these objects do exist outside of and independently of the existence or perception of

any human being, but these objects are only imperfect or incomplete particulars of an ideal object or essence existing in some sphere transcending the material world (for example a particular tree is only an imperfect expression of "treeness") or they are the extension, or creation, of concepts or consciousness in the abstract, or of a supernatural being (or beings) which exist in some sphere transcending the material world (this latter notion being the religious one in its different forms).

In short, what all idealism denies and opposes is the fundamental truth that all reality consists of matter in motion and there is no existence, of any kind, that does not consist in this. In fact, the human brain itself consists of matter, which has evolved to the point where it is capable of the conscious thinking characteristic of human beings. And the thought process in the human brain can itself be shown to consist of the transformation of matter — electrical and chemical interactions, etc. But even the discovery and practical verification of this have not, of course, defeated idealism, nor can any single scientific advance, no matter how significant — nor even all such scientific discoveries taken together — lead to the triumph of materialism over idealism. For this, a consistent, all-around, thoroughgoing materialist worldview is required, which draws from and is continually deepened by advances in science — as well as in society overall, in particular its revolutionary transformation — and which is capable of assimilating and synthesizing these developments. This worldview is dialectical materialism and as Engels pointed out, it was Marx who, more than anyone else, was responsible for bringing it into being.<sup>17</sup>

Earlier, Engels' distinction of the two "great camps" in philosophy was cited. Note that there he says that those "who regarded nature as primary, belong to the various schools of materialism." But, as Engels also makes clear, among these "various schools of materialism" it is only Marxism that is consistently materialist. All others leave openings to and sooner or

<sup>17</sup> See Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, MESW, Vol. 3, p. 361.

later fall themselves into idealism. The reason for this goes back to the earlier statement that all reality consists of matter in motion. "Motion is the mode of existence of matter," Engels explains in another work, and, "Matter without motion is just as inconceivable as motion without matter."<sup>18</sup> It is because there is and can be no motion without matter and no matter without motion that the only consistent materialism is dialectical materialism, which takes the material world as it is in the most profound sense — recognizing that it is in a process of constant change and of transformation from one state into another. Just as there can be no matter without motion, and vice versa, so there can be no thoroughgoing materialism that is not dialectical, and vice versa. Thus primitive and mechanical materialism — which view matter as unchanging or undergoing only mechanical change (a change in quantity, from one place to another, etc.) — are ultimately incapable of completely rupturing with idealism and fall back into it. If, for example, things are seen to be at rest within themselves and the internal contradiction and motion within these things is not grasped, so that the only kind of motion attributed to them is mechanical and the cause of any motion and change is seen to be external, then when applied to the development and especially the origin of the world (or the universe), this conception must rely on or at least admit of some "external impulse" to explain this. This, in one form or another, is a way of acknowledging (or more correctly, inventing) the existence of some supernatural force as the "prime mover" in the universe — it is a form of idealism, akin to if not directly religious in the last analysis. Such materialism is metaphysical: it seeks, or is at least compatible with the notion of searching for, the ultimate, and therefore unchanging, cause of things, along with viewing motion and change in the mechanical way described. It is for this reason that, as Mao Tsetung put it, metaphysics, "whether in China or in Europe . . . is part and parcel of the ideal-

<sup>18</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976), Part 1: "Philosophy," Section 6: "Natural Philosophy. Cosmogony, Physics, Chemistry," p. 74, emphasis in original.

ist world outlook."<sup>19</sup>

Noting that "throughout the history of human knowledge, there have been two conceptions concerning the law of development of the universe, the metaphysical conception and the dialectical conception, which form two opposing world outlooks," Mao cites the following statement by Lenin as a basic summary of this point:

The two basic (or two possible? or two historically observable?) conceptions of development (evolution) are: development as decrease and increase, as repetition, and development as a unity of opposites (the division of a unity into mutually exclusive opposites and their reciprocal relation).<sup>20</sup>

The dialectical view of development, then, recognizes that all things are unities of opposites, which have relative identity with each other — under certain conditions and for a certain time — thus forming the particular thing, but are from beginning to end locked in struggle with each other, a struggle which, as the main force but also in interpenetration with other things, will eventually result in the splitting apart of the unity and the replacement of the thing by another thing (another unity of opposites, or contradiction). At its inception, and for a certain period, one of the aspects of the contradiction (one of the opposites) will be dominant over the other and this characterizes the relative essence, or identity, of the thing; or as Mao put it: "The nature of a thing is determined mainly by the principal aspect of a contradiction, the aspect which has gained the dominant position."<sup>21</sup> But, as this statement by Mao reflects, at a certain point in the struggle of these opposites the formerly subordinate aspect will gain dominance over the formerly dominant aspect — these aspects will be transformed into their opposites — and the rising

<sup>19</sup> Mao, *On Contradiction*, SW, Vol. 1, p. 312.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 311-312; see Lenin, "On the Question of Dialectics," *Collected Works (CW)*, 45 Volumes (Moscow: Progress Publishers), Vol. 38, p. 360, emphasis in original.

<sup>21</sup> Mao, *On Contradiction*, SW, Vol. 1, p. 333.

aspect which has become dominant will more slowly or more rapidly eliminate the other, replacing the old unity with a new one.

This is obviously an extremely complex process in real life, particularly since the identity of things is only relative and there is interpenetration between different contradictions; and it would be contrary to the basic principles of dialectics and self-defeating if the sketch presented here (which is all it is possible to present here) were taken as some absolute, unvarying pattern or formula. The essential point is that dialectics reveals the inner contradiction within all things, as well as the interaction between different things, and the fact that identity, unity, equilibrium, rest and so on are only relative, while struggle, motion, change are absolute; and further, that after a certain point in the struggle of opposites, in interpenetration with other things, there is a leap, a transformation of the aspects into their opposites, and sooner or later a rupturing of the old identity and its replacement by a new relative identity (unity of opposites). It is only with such an understanding of development that there can be a consistent, thoroughgoing materialism.

In founding this dialectical materialism Marx not only adopted and transformed the basic dialectical method of Hegel — whose dialectics was idealist, viewing both nature and society as the unfolding of abstract consciousness, finally reaching its culmination in the Hegelian philosophical system itself — Marx also broke through the barriers that separated the materialist reflection of reality from its transformation in practice. "The chief defect of all previous materialism," Marx wrote in 1845 when he was first becoming a Marxist, "is that things, reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the *object*, or of *contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity*, *practice*, not subjectively."<sup>22</sup> Marx insisted that even the correct relationship between thinking and being cannot be grasped — let alone acted

<sup>22</sup> Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," original version, in Marx and Engels, *Feuerbach. Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlooks* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), p. 96, emphasis in original.

upon — by mere contemplation, but only through practice:

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question. . . .

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*.<sup>23</sup>

Extending dialectical materialism to human history and society, Marx drew the famous conclusion: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it."<sup>24</sup>

Before moving on to the question of how Marx applied dialectical materialism to the analysis of the historical development of human society, and of capitalist society and its replacement by communism in particular, it is perhaps necessary to take up the question of why it is correct to make such an application — to extend dialectical materialism to society and human history — since it is not infrequently argued that, even if dialectical materialism does represent the correct reflection of nature, it is erroneous to apply the same principles to society and history. Lenin, in separate essays on Marx and Engels, said the following about this general point: "Since materialism in general explains consciousness as the outcome of being, and not conversely, materialism as applied to the social life of mankind demands that *social* consciousness be explained as the outcome of *social* being"; and "just as material causes underlie all natural phenomena, so the development of human society is conditioned by the development of material forces, the productive forces."<sup>25</sup> But why is this correct, and further why is it that the

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97, emphasis in original.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98, emphasis in original.

<sup>25</sup> Lenin, "Karl Marx" and "Frederick Engels," in *Marx Engels Marxism*, pp. 13, 47, emphasis in original.

principles of dialectics should apply to human history and society?

We have already seen that human beings themselves, including their brains, are (consist of) nothing but matter in motion — matter that has evolved to a state capable of a certain kind of consciousness, but matter nonetheless — and so the principles applicable to the existence and development of matter in general apply to human beings as well. One important application of this is that human beings during their lifetimes must not only sustain but constantly regenerate themselves (cells of their bodies, etc.), by eating and so on, and must reproduce. And in order to do this they must enter into society and develop through society their productive forces. Further, since the productive forces themselves (including tools as well as the people) must be not merely maintained but reproduced, and since this involves continual change (including interaction with a natural environment that is in the process of various kinds of changes), the carrying out of production is, as noted earlier, a dynamic activity — new productive forces are constantly being developed.

But because these productive forces can only be developed by people entering into certain production relations — and because in turn these production relations give rise to a superstructure of politics and ideology that reflects and protects them — there are powerful forces in society, those whose position in the production relations is a dominant one and whose interests and ideas are the governing ones in the superstructure, who resist any qualitative transformation in the production relations and the superstructure, any transformation that would challenge the entire framework of these production relations and superstructure. Therefore, once the development of the productive forces demands it, a radical rupture must take place in society — the revolutionary overthrow of the old superstructure and the production relations maintained by it. So long as the level of the productive forces, at whatever stage of society, remains relatively undeveloped so that scarcity and the individual struggle for existence cannot be eliminated throughout society and for its members generally, this basic contradiction (involv-

ing the productive forces and the production relations and the superstructure) will assume the form of class division, and the leaps in transforming the superstructure and production relations (in order to once again liberate the productive forces) will assume the form of an antagonistic struggle between classes. With the eventual establishment, through this process, of the material and ideological conditions for communism, this will no longer assume the form of antagonistic class conflict, but the basic contradiction — that the development of the productive forces will run ahead of the production relations and the superstructure, plus the fact that the superstructure does not passively reflect the economic base but reacts dialectically with it — this will continue in force and will continue to call forth struggles and after a certain development leaps and ruptures with old forms, institutions and ideas in society. All this provides the basic answer to why and how the principles of dialectical materialism do apply to human society and its historical development.

Historical materialism — the application of Marxist philosophy to society and its development — is precisely dialectical materialism and not mechanical materialism. On the one hand, Marx stressed:

The productive forces are therefore the result of practically applied human energy; but this energy is itself conditioned by the circumstances in which men find themselves, by the productive forces already acquired, by the social form which exists before they exist, which they do not create, which is the product of the preceding generation. Because of the simple fact that every succeeding generation finds itself in possession of the productive forces acquired by the previous generation, and that they serve it as the raw material for new production, a coherence arises in human history, a history of humanity takes shape which becomes all the more a history of humanity the more the productive forces of men and therefore their social relations develop.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> "Marx to P.V. Annenkov," (December 28, 1846), Marx and Engels, *Selected Letters* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977), p. 3.

At the same time, however, he stressed that this "coherence" did not take the form of linear, straight-line, uninterrupted development but proceeded through contradiction — including the interplay of different contradictions — and was marked by qualitative leaps and radical ruptures. Thus, precisely in emphasizing materialism Marx emphasizes the dialectical development of society, as for example in the following criticism of the utopian schemes of the petty-bourgeois "socialist" reformer Proudhon:

Mr. Proudhon confuses ideas with things. Men never relinquish what they have won, but this does not mean that they never relinquish the social form in which they have acquired certain productive forces. On the contrary, in order that they may not be deprived of the results attained and forfeit the fruits of civilization, they are obliged, when the mode of carrying on commerce no longer corresponds to the productive forces acquired, to change all their traditional social forms. . . . Thus the economic forms in which men produce, consume, and exchange are *transitory and historical*. With the acquisition of new productive forces, men change their mode of production and with the mode of production all the economic relations which are merely the relations appropriate to a particular mode of production.<sup>27</sup>

In this whole process and especially during those periods when the revolutionary transformation of society is demanded in order to liberate the productive forces, people and their conscious actions play a tremendously important role. One of the key points of materialist dialectics is that matter and consciousness are a unity of opposites and therefore can be transformed into one another, so that, even though in the overall sense matter is primary and the source of consciousness, consciousness in turn can and does exert a tremendous influence in guiding people in transforming the material world, and the more so the more that consciousness is a true reflection of material reality — in its process of motion and development — and

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 4, emphasis in original.

therefore is able to accelerate the motion and change called forth by developments in the material world. In the sphere of society and history, this means that people, and in particular the class-conscious representatives of the advanced class in any stage of class-divided society, play a crucial and dynamic role not simply in the development of the productive forces but more than that in the revolutionary transformation of the superstructure, beginning with the overthrow of the old order, and of the production relations — in the "changing of all traditional social forms" — in order to advance society and its productive basis to a new stage.

Engels pointed out, in opposition to mechanical materialism:

According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Neither Marx nor I have ever asserted more than this. Therefore if somebody twists this into saying that the economic factor is the *only* determining one, he is transforming that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various components of the superstructure . . . also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases determine their *form* in particular.<sup>28</sup>

Engels went on to emphasize the importance of individuals and their conscious role (their wills) in this whole process. But these individuals play a part most of all as members of classes (in class society) and even more fundamentally, in playing a conscious dynamic role, people — and in particular the class-conscious representatives of the contending classes — are acting, and thinking, upon a certain material foundation which is independent of the wills of individuals or even of classes. As Engels explained in the same letter cited just above, "We make our history ourselves, but, first of all, under very definite assump-

<sup>28</sup> "Engels to J. Bloch" (September 21-22, 1890), in *ibid.*, p. 75, emphasis in original.



tions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are ultimately decisive."<sup>29</sup>

How does all this apply, then, to capitalist society and its ultimate replacement by communism?

### ***3. The basic contradiction of capitalism and its motion toward the final elimination of capitalism and class society generally***

... As to myself, no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society, nor yet the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this struggle of the classes, and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes. What I did that was new was to prove: (1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production; (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society....<sup>30</sup>

In the above statement Marx not only gives a sweeping view of the historical development of society in general but situates capitalist society (and the class struggle in that society, leading to the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat) in this historical development, emphasizing capitalism's transitory nature and role in opposition to those who would declare it to be the end point of society's development and an eternal system. He goes on immediately to say,

Ignorant louts like Heinzen, who deny not merely the class struggle but even the existence of classes, only prove that,

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>30</sup> "Marx to J. Weydemeyer" (March 5, 1852), in *ibid.*, p. 18, emphasis and ellipses in original.

despite all their blood-curdling yelps and the humanitarian airs they give themselves, they regard the social conditions under which the bourgeoisie rules as the final product, the *non plus ultra* [highest point possible — B.A.] of history, and that they are only the servants of the bourgeoisie. And the less these louts realize the magnitude and the transitory necessity of the bourgeois regime the more disgusting is their servitude.<sup>31</sup>

Marx showed that, although the process had involved different specific features in the different capitalist countries, capitalism had arisen, at first within feudal society, because of the development of the productive forces, interacting with other events and factors — including the expansion of trade, not only within countries but internationally, the discovery and conquest by European nations of America and other areas and their resources, gold and silver among them, the expansion of the slave trade and of slavery in America, the ruin and expulsion of vast peasant populations from their farmlands in the European countries, the influence of wars, etc. After a certain point, the development of capitalist relations — and of the productive forces — ran inexorably up against the restraints imposed by the production relations and superstructure of feudalism and the bourgeoisie came to the fore to lead a revolution to overthrow the feudal order and establish the capitalist order. But beyond this, Marx showed that, once having gained the upper hand and shattered the fetters on its development, capitalism — more powerfully and dynamically than any previous system — was driving toward its own extinction, brought about through the revolution of the exploited class of capitalist society, the proletariat, whose interests lie in replacing capitalism with communism. Marx and Engels expressed it this way in the *Communist Manifesto*:

The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the laborers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of modern industry, therefore, cuts

<sup>31</sup> "Marx to Joseph Weydemeyer in New York" (March 5, 1852), Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), p. 64.

from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.<sup>32</sup>

Seeing capitalism as part of the "coherence" in human history cited earlier, and applying to capitalist society the basic principle of the motion of that history — anchored in the development of the productive forces and centering on the fact that repeatedly, through various forms of society, this development brings the productive forces into antagonism with the existing relations of production and their corresponding superstructure, requiring the revolutionary overthrow of the latter — Marx brought to light the fundamental contradiction of capitalism: between socialized production and private (capitalist) appropriation. But Marx did not merely make this general analysis — he thoroughly dissected the capitalist mode of production, beginning with its basic element, the commodity, in his landmark work, *Capital*. Mao Tsetung, in his essay *On Contradiction*, cited Lenin's summation of Marx's application of the principles of materialist dialectics in *Capital*:

In his *Capital*, Marx first analyzes the simplest, most ordinary and fundamental, most common and everyday relation of bourgeois (commodity) society, a relation encountered billions of times, viz., the exchange of commodities. In this very simple phenomenon (in this "cell" of bourgeois society) analysis reveals all the contradictions (or the germs of all the contradictions) of modern society. The subsequent exposition shows us the development (both growth and movement) of these contradictions and of this society in the [summation] of its individual parts, from its beginning to its end.<sup>33</sup>

A summation of Marx's dissecting of the capitalist mode of production, and in particular of the "exposition" referred to by

<sup>32</sup> Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Mao, *On Contradiction*, SW, Vol. 1, p. 319; see Lenin, "On the Question of Dialectics," CW, Vol. 38, p. 360, emphasis in original.

Lenin above, is clearly beyond the scope of this essay, but several main points in relation to this are very important here. In his analysis, Marx showed that a commodity is something that is produced not for direct use by its producer but for exchange (and use by someone else), and he focused on the basic contradiction inherent in commodities: that they have only exchange value for their producer and use value only for their consumer, and that they both represent the product of useful, or concrete, labor (the particular kind of labor required to produce them as opposed to other commodities) and embody abstract labor (the application of human labor power in general, abstracted from its particular form). Now capitalism is that form of society in which (in the main and overwhelmingly) commodity production (and exchange) becomes generalized, in which human labor power itself becomes a commodity and production is carried out by the class, the proletariat, which possesses this labor power alone as a means of attaining its basic livelihood and must sell it piecemeal (by the hour, the day, etc.) to the owners of the means of production, the bourgeoisie, in order to live. It is thus with the development of capitalism that the contradictions inherent in commodities — or what Lenin referred to as the "germs of all the contradictions of modern society" — fully flower and the fundamental contradiction emerges, between socialized production and private (capitalist) appropriation.

Engels, in reviewing this, and in particular the transition from feudal to capitalist society, pointed out that,

Prior to capitalist production, i.e., in the Middle Ages, small-scale production generally prevailed, based upon the workers' private ownership of their means of production: the agriculture of the small peasant, freeman or serf, and the handicrafts in the towns. The instruments of labor — land, agricultural implements, the workshop, the hand tool — were the instruments of labor of single individuals, adapted for individual use, and, therefore, of necessity puny, dwarfish, circumscribed. But for this very reason they normally belonged to the producer himself.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Part 3: "Socialism," Section 2: "Theoretical," p. 345.

And despite the existence of commodity production and exchange in pre-capitalist society, the small-scale production Engels refers to above was mainly natural (non-commodity) production (production for direct consumption by the immediate producer, or the feudal lord and his retainers, etc.). Capitalism dramatically changed all this: it not only replaced natural production with commodity production, extending and generalizing the latter, but, bound up with this, it replaced small-scale, scattered means of production with large-scale, concentrated ones. "To concentrate these scattered, limited means of production, to enlarge them, to turn them into the powerful levers of production of the present day was precisely the historic role of the capitalist mode of production and of its upholder, the bourgeoisie," wrote Engels. "But," he continued, "the bourgeoisie could not transform these limited means of production into mighty productive forces without at the same time transforming them from individual means of production into *social* means of production only workable by a *collectivity of men*." And further, "Like the means of production, production itself changed from a series of individual operations into a series of social acts, and the products from individual into social products. . . . No one person could say of them: 'I made that, this is my product.'"<sup>35</sup>

Yet the appropriation and ownership of both the means of production and the products remain private, the property of the capitalists, while, as noted earlier, the proletarians are bereft of all ownership of the means of production and are able to acquire the money to buy even the mere means of subsistence only by selling their ability to work (their labor power) to the capitalists and carrying out, under the command of the capitalists, socialized production with the large-scale means of production owned by the capitalists. But that is not all. The products of this process are not useful to the capitalists nor are they intended for their use; as this is commodity production, the products have value for their capitalist owners only as exchange value — only in be-

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 345-346, emphasis in original.

ing sold (exchanged for money). If, for any reason, the capitalists are unable to sell these products, then they not only do not gain but they lose the value (the money) they have exchanged to buy the labor power of the workers as well as the means of production (machines, buildings, raw materials, etc.).

This takes us back to the basic contradiction inherent in commodities — between concrete (useful) labor and abstract labor and between use value and exchange value. It is because of this contradiction that, on the one hand, commodities can be exchanged with one another — if there were not different kinds of concrete labor producing different kinds of products there would be no basis for exchange (there would be no point in exchanging objects that are identical, that are the product of the same kind of concrete labor) and if all these products did not have in common that they embody, in various quantities, human labor in general (abstract labor) there would be no basis for exchanging equivalents and commodity production would break down (since people who were exchanging commodities embodying more labor for others embodying less would sooner or later stop this exchange, or die off). But, on the other hand, it is also because of this contradiction that there is always the possibility that commodities produced may *not* be exchanged, that buyers for them — people to whom they are useful and who are therefore willing to exchange other commodities (or money, the universal equivalent of all commodities) for them, and who possess these other commodities to exchange — may not be found.

But the capitalist is not a simple commodity producer, aiming merely to exchange his products for others, on an equivalent basis (nor is he essentially concerned with swindling others in the exchange of commodities, though he is unlikely to pass up the opportunity if it arises). Instead, the capitalist aims to complete each cycle comprising the production and exchange of products with more value than when he began. And, in fact, if he does not succeed in doing this, he cannot long remain a capitalist. But inasmuch as this cannot be accomplished through swindling — fundamentally or in the long term, because what

one gains in the swindle the other loses and soon there would be nothing left to swindle — there must be another basis for it, since in fact the capitalists (or the ones who survive as capitalists) do end up with more money than they invest to begin with. The basis lies in the fact that labor power is a commodity in capitalist society but a very unique commodity, for unlike other commodities it has the ability in its use — in its application by the capitalist (that is, under his command) to the process of production — to create additional value. A machine, by contrast, embodies so much value (the equivalent of which the capitalist must exchange for the machine in acquiring it for use) and in its use it transfers this value (bit by bit) to the products, but it adds no new value. Human labor power, however, in its use in production, creates not only the value equivalent to the workers' wages (the value exchanged to buy the labor power) but an additional value besides, which is also incorporated in the products and is realized in exchange (selling) by the capitalist who appropriates the products (presuming he can sell them at their value). This additional value Marx called *surplus value*. But how is it that the labor power of the workers creates this surplus value in production?

As has been touched on only indirectly and in passing so far, the value of any commodity is determined by the amount (measured in time, for example hours) of labor, under average social conditions, that is incorporated in it. On this basis of socially necessary labor time for production, commodities can be equated in value with one another and correspondingly exchanged (in modern society this takes place through the medium of money, which stands as the universal equivalent of all commodities, but the underlying basis remains socially necessary labor time). The value of the labor power of the workers is equal to the value of the products (food, clothing, housing, etc.) necessary to maintain the workers and replace those which are used up (raise new generations of workers). But with the productive forces characteristic of capitalism, the worker can produce far more value in the average working day than the value of his own labor power — in other words, he can and does produce

surplus value — or he does not work. And this is increasingly the case the more the productive forces, and specifically the means of production (machinery, etc.), are developed, including for the reason that this cheapens the cost of producing the value of the workers' labor power (less of the working day is required for this). Thus, the heart of capitalist production is the exploitation of the proletariat: the appropriation by the capitalists of surplus value created in the process of production by the workers.

All this interacts with the fact that, as Engels put it, although the "means of production and production itself have become social in essence . . . they are subjected to a form of appropriation which presupposes private production by individuals, and under which, therefore, everyone owns his own product and brings it to market."<sup>36</sup> As a consequence, the condition of commodity production remains fundamentally in force — that, "No one knows how much of the article he produces is coming onto the market or how much will be wanted, no one knows whether his individual product will meet a real need, whether he will cover his costs or even be able to sell it at all."<sup>37</sup> And the result:

Anarchy of social production prevails. But like all other forms of production, commodity production has its own peculiar laws, which are inherent in and inseparable from it; and these laws assert themselves despite anarchy, in and through anarchy. They are manifested in the only persistent form of the social nexus, in exchange, and impose themselves on the individual producers as compulsory laws of competition.<sup>38</sup>

This continues to exert its influence even though the individual capitalists (and associations of capitalists of various kinds) make increasing efforts to estimate (and control) the market, to organize production and coordinate it with these estimates, plans, etc. In fact the more that individual capitalists (or groups of capitalists) do plan and organize the production they control,

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

the more they heighten the contradiction between organization and anarchy and sharpen the competitive struggle between capitalists; and this increases and intensifies the more that capitalism develops and expands, not only within this or that country but internationally, assuming the form of competitive battles between capitalists within the same country but also international rivalry, reaching its most extreme form in war between states representing the collective national capitals. Having discussed how this applies not only "between individual capitalists" but also more broadly "between whole industries and whole countries," Engels sums up that "the contradiction between social production and capitalist appropriation reproduces itself as *the antagonism between the organization of production in the individual factory and the anarchy of production in society as a whole.*"<sup>39</sup>

The production and appropriation of surplus value by many different capitalists is the basis for competitive economic battles between capitalists. In order to pursue — and gain advantage in — this competitive battle, the different capitalists must introduce new machinery (and production techniques, etc.) to reduce their costs of production and take various other steps to increase the surplus value produced by the workers. Thus the development of capitalism does not merely mean that the laboring population is more and more transformed into propertyless proletarians who must sell their labor power to the capitalists in order to live, but that the exploitation of the proletarians increases and their enslavement to capital is fortified.<sup>40</sup>

The other major manifestation of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism, then, is the class contradiction; or, in Engels' words: "*The contradiction between social production and capitalist appropriation became manifest as the antagonism between*

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 352, emphasis in original.

<sup>40</sup> In the last century, when capitalism was still in its earlier stage, Marx analyzed this phenomenon especially (though not exclusively) in terms of Europe, but in this era, when capitalism is in its highest and final stage of imperialism, this must be viewed first and foremost in an international dimension — a point to be taken up later.

*proletariat and bourgeoisie.*"<sup>41</sup> Engels further presents a synthesis of this, indicating the interconnection and interaction of these two major manifestations of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism in the motion of capitalism toward its own final elimination: "The capitalist mode of production moves in these two phenomenal forms of the contradiction immanent in it by its very origin. . . . It is the motive force of the social anarchy of production which increasingly transforms the great majority of men into proletarians, and it is the proletarian masses in their turn who will ultimately put an end to the anarchy of production."<sup>42</sup> And,

This solution can only consist in actually recognizing the social nature of the modern productive forces and in therefore bringing the mode of production, appropriation and exchange into harmony with the social character of the means of production. This can only be brought about by society's openly and straightforwardly taking possession of the productive forces, which have outgrown all guidance other than that of society itself. . . .

By increasingly transforming the great majority of the population into proletarians, the capitalist mode of production creates the force which, under penalty of its own destruction, is compelled to accomplish this revolution.<sup>43</sup>

The overthrow and final elimination of capitalism and its replacement by communism — where society "openly and straightforwardly [takes] possession of the productive forces, which have outgrown all guidance other than that of society itself" — must be the conscious act of the proletariat and can be achieved only as the result of determined struggle, first in overthrowing the bourgeois state and then in thoroughly transforming the political and ideological superstructure and the economic foundation of society. As Marx summarized, on the basis not only of historical materialist analysis in general but in

<sup>41</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 349, emphasis in original.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 352.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 360-361, 362.

particular the dissecting of the revolutionary experience of the proletariat so far — above all the historic if short-lived Paris Commune of 1871, the first embryonic form of the dictatorship of the proletariat — the proletariat, in seizing power, begins the revolutionization of society "as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society" and the ultimate attainment of communism, with its principle "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs," can only be realized

after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and with it also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but itself life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly — only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right [payment according to labor performed, equal pay for equal work, etc. — B.A.] be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!<sup>44</sup>

Obviously, this requires the transformation not only of relations and institutions but of the people and their thinking as well. Or, as Marx already set forth in 1850, in summing up the recent revolutions in Europe and the role — and defeat — of the proletariat in them (in France in particular), communism, or revolutionary socialism, is distinguished from utopian and ultimately reformist socialism in that communism

is the *declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the abolition of class distinctions generally, to the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from these social relations.*<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), p. 17.

<sup>45</sup> Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850*, MESW, Vol. 1, p. 282, emphasis in original.

It is therefore not surprising that this process is not only a complex but a protracted one — and it has proved to be even more so than Marx anticipated, though he many times referred to the complexity and protractedness involved in achieving such an historic transformation of human society. But at the same time, the fundamental truth revealed by Marx remains fully in force: the capitalist system, through its own motion and the contradictions immanent in it, continues to drive toward and strengthen the conditions for its replacement and supersession by communism through the proletarian revolution. "To grasp the historical conditions of this act and therefore its very nature," wrote Engels, "and thus to bring the conditions and character of its own action to the consciousness of the class that is destined to act, the class that is now oppressed — this is the task of scientific socialism, the theoretical expression of the proletarian movement."<sup>46</sup>

#### **4. Marxism as science and in contrast to previous and opposing worldviews**

More than a few people rebel against the assertion that Marxism is a science. In part — and leaving aside those who have a class interest in opposing Marxism — this is because of a misconception of what it means to call Marxism science, and more fundamentally of what science is, viewing it as something rigid, ossified, a set of transcendental "laws" standing above reality, lifeless and mysterious formulae comprehensible only to a select and strange few — THE SCIENTISTS. In short, the very opposite of what science is, and must be. This problem was addressed in the recent report from the Central Committee of our party, where it was stressed that Marxism must be "understood as a living science with a process of development" (see the *Revolutionary Worker*, supplement to No. 194, Feb. 25, 1983, p. 5). Of course, the resistance to viewing Marxism as a science — speak-

<sup>46</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 369-370.

ing, again, of people without a vested interest in opposing Marxism — is furthered by the fact that among many so-called "Marxists," and more particularly the rulers of the revisionist countries that proclaim themselves Marxists, there is the treatment of Marxism as lifeless dogma, akin to a religious catechism, ripping out and attempting to suffocate its revolutionary thrust and critical spirit. And the struggle against the conversion of Marxism into religious dogma has been and remains a crucial part of upholding and applying Marxism itself.<sup>47</sup>

What is most controversial, however, is Marxism's claim to be not just a science but an all-encompassing science, a single, unified worldview and methodology that provides a comprehensive approach to analyzing — and synthesizing — and to changing reality, both nature and society. But if, in fact, the material world exists objectively and all reality consists of matter in motion (motion being the mode of existence of matter, as Engels pointed out), and further if, as has been indicated here, the principle reflecting this — dialectical materialism — is not only universally applicable in nature but can and must be extended to society, then indeed this does represent such a comprehensive approach that must be the fundamental principle in all investigation, and action. This does not mean that there is no need for dealing with the specific quality and characteristics of different things or that in dealing with any problem the repetition of the basic principles of dialectical materialism and historical materialism will provide the solution and way forward. What it means is that these basic principles must be the guiding ones precisely in examining the particularities of different things (different contradictions). Mao Tsetung spoke to

<sup>47</sup> It must be remarked, however, that once again the classical apologists of bourgeois society are more than a little hypocritical in their denunciation and ridicule of Marxism as religious dogma, since they do not oppose but promote real religious dogma and its unabashed claim to absolute, self-contained, unchanging knowledge, as revealed by the true prophet, savior, etc.; that, however, does not relieve those who seek to overthrow the bourgeois order and its ideology, including religion, of the responsibility to grasp, apply and develop Marxism not as dogma but as living science.

this in relation to the sphere of culture:

To study Marxism means to apply the dialectical materialist and historical materialist viewpoint in our observation of the world, of society and of literature and art; it does not mean writing philosophical lectures into our works of literature and art. Marxism embraces but cannot replace realism in literary and artistic creation, just as it embraces but cannot replace the atomic and electronic theories in physics.<sup>48</sup>

Here it is worth recalling the statement by Mao cited in the introduction of this essay, that Marxism "has in no way exhausted truth but ceaselessly opens up roads to the knowledge of truth in the course of practice" and that, in this sense and with this spirit, "dialectical materialism is universally true because it is impossible for anyone to escape from its domain in his practice."<sup>49</sup>

Mao also noted in the same essay that "in class society everyone lives as a member of a particular class, and every kind of thinking, without exception, is stamped with the brand of a class."<sup>50</sup> This, too, is a very sharply contested idea, but it is no less true than it is controversial. One of the main reasons why this idea is attacked is precisely that the ruling class, in seeking to maintain its rule and the present form of society, has a great necessity to cover up the class nature of the superstructure, including not only political institutions but ideology as well — it needs to and makes great effort to present its outlook and its interests as universal, common to all groups, or classes, in society. On the other hand, for the proletariat and oppressed masses it is just as crucial to penetrate this camouflage and make a scientific, class analysis of all principles, programs, etc.

It is not that truth itself has a class character, but in class society the perception of reality and notions of whether or how to change it will depend in the final analysis on class outlook. This is true for the class-conscious proletarians (and others who

<sup>48</sup> Mao, *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art*, SW, Vol. 3, p. 94.

<sup>49</sup> Mao, *On Practice*, SW, Vol. 1, pp. 307-308, p. 305.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

take up their stand and outlook) as well. But the outlook of the proletariat, the scientific worldview and methodology of Marxism, unlike all other class outlooks, is not only partisan, it is also true. It represents a class outlook but it is not blinded or prejudiced by class *bias*. This is because of the fact that the position and role of the proletariat in society and human history are radically different from those of any other class. The proletariat carries out socialized production in a society (and world) marked by large-scale industry, the widespread application of science, highly developed means of communication, etc.; it is the exploited class in capitalist society, a society split in the main into two directly antagonistic classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; because of its propertyless condition it is subjected to domination and exploitation by capital and subordinated to the dynamics of capitalist accumulation, and its interests lie in the thorough revolutionization of society, in bringing about the most radical rupture with traditional property relations and traditional ideas, as it is put in the *Communist Manifesto*<sup>51</sup> — the proletariat can emancipate itself only by abolishing not just capitalism but all exploitation, indeed all class distinctions and their material and ideological bases. It is for this reason that Marxism openly proclaims its class character and ruthlessly exposes the class character and interests in all relations, institutions and ways of thinking in present-day (and past) society.

The importance and political implications of this were powerfully indicated by Lenin when he insisted:

People always were and always will be the foolish victims of deceit and self-deceit in politics until they learn to discover the *interests* of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises. The supporters of reforms and improvements will always be fooled by the defenders of the old order until they realize that every old institution, however barbarous and rotten it may appear to be, is maintained by the forces of some ruling classes.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> See Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 59.

<sup>52</sup> Lenin, "The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism," in *Marx Engels Marxism*, p. 73, emphasis in original.

In this light, let's return to the point introduced at the start of this chapter on historical materialism — that philosophers and political thinkers down through the ages, before Marx, have been unable to even correctly pose, let alone answer, the basic questions concerning the nature, organization and development of society (and of course this applies to contemporary figures who oppose Marxism as well). In part, in the past, this could be attributed to limitations on people's understanding owing to the low level of development of the productive forces, but all of the great philosophers and political thinkers have lived in class society and their ideas have been limited and distorted by class bias as well as the general level and conditions of the societies and ages in which they lived. Some examples will help illustrate this.

Plato is a major figure in the history of Western civilization and his ideas have exerted, and continue to exert, a significant influence in philosophy and politics in the Western capitalist countries. The following are excerpts from Plato's *Republic*, his major work on politics and the state:

It is true, we shall tell our people in this fable, that all of you in this land are brothers; but the god who fashioned you mixed gold in the composition of those among you who are fit to rule, so that they are the most precious quality; and put silver in the Auxiliaries, and iron and brass in the farmers and craftsmen. . . .

So, if a state is constituted on natural principles, the wisdom it possesses as a whole will be due to the knowledge residing in the smallest part, the one which takes the lead and governs the rest. Such knowledge is the only kind that deserves the name of wisdom, and it appears to be ordained by nature that the class privileged to possess it should be the smallest of all. . . .

No great harm would be done to the community by a general interchange of most forms of work, the carpenter and the cobbler exchanging their positions and their tools and taking on each other's jobs, or even the same man undertaking both.

But another kind of interchange would be disastrous. Suppose, for instance, someone who nature designed to be an artisan or tradesman should be emboldened by some advantage, such as wealth or command of votes or bodily strength, to try to



enter the order of fighting men; or some member of that order should aspire, beyond his merits, to a seat in the council chamber of the Guardians. Such interference and exchange of social positions and tools, or the attempt to combine all these forms of work in the same person, would be fatal to the commonwealth.<sup>53</sup>

Here it is not very difficult to see not only a reflection of the society in which Plato lived, including a hierarchy of different classes, but also the fact that Plato's ideas represent a clear class outlook, specifically that of the ruling class and its political elite. It is both ironic and fitting that in the U.S. it is commonly taught in school that the ancient Greece of Plato was the "cradle of our democracy," since, whatever the intentions of the ruling class in teaching this, it helps to clarify that in U.S. society today no less than in ancient Greek society democracy is a class question and has a class content — it is democracy for the ruling class and oppression for the masses. But that is not the whole picture, yet. Besides the clear differentiation and ranking of classes set forth in Plato's writings, the society of which he wrote contained large numbers of slaves, was in fact founded on slavery. Thus Plato asserts that

it is also true that the great mass of multifarious appetites and pleasures and pains will be found to occur chiefly in *children* and *women* and *slaves*, and, among free men so called, in the inferior multitude; whereas the simple and moderate desires which, with the aid of reason and right belief, are guided by reflection, you will find only in a few, and those with the best inborn dispositions and the best educated.<sup>54</sup>

Plato is upheld, indeed revered, by ruling classes today as a man of great wisdom who grappled profoundly with questions such as the nature and content of justice and its relation to reason. And in fact, Plato argued that the political system he ad-

<sup>53</sup> Plato, in Michael Curtis, ed., *The Great Political Theories* (Avon Books), Vol. 1, pp. 38, 44, 46.

<sup>54</sup> Plato, in *ibid.*, p. 45, emphasis added.

vocated should be ruled by a philosopher-king, one who "contemplates a world of unchanging and harmonious order where reason governs and nothing can do or suffer wrong"; and that, within each person as well, "it will be the business of reason to rule with wisdom and forethought on behalf of the entire soul; while the spirited element ought to act as its subordinate and ally."<sup>55</sup> What this illustrates is not that Plato was a hypocrite so much as that in his case as in class society generally, all notions of wisdom, reason, right and wrong, etc., have a definite class character.

Similarly, Christian religious doctrine — which drew fairly extensively from the tradition of ancient Greece as well as reflecting the age and society which shaped those who formulated this doctrine — sanctions slavery, as well as class oppression generally, insists on the inferior status of women, and so on. This can be found throughout both the old and new testaments of the Christian bible.<sup>56</sup> For example:

Wives should regard their husbands as they regard the Lord, since as Christ is head of the Church and saves the whole body,

<sup>55</sup> Plato, in *ibid.*, pp. 63, 48.

<sup>56</sup> It is sometimes suggested that while Western traditions and values do stress acquisitiveness and "materialism" (in the narrow, philistine sense — greediness, miserliness, etc.) and do sanction oppression, the same is not true of non-Western philosophies. A few examples will help demonstrate, however, that this is far from the case.

*The Koran* boldly and repeatedly stresses the inferior status of women. Even the rewards promised the faithful leave no room for doubt on this:

"But the true servants of Allah shall be well provided for, feasting on fruit, and honored in the gardens of delight. Reclining face to face upon soft couches, they shall be served with a goblet filled at a gushing fountain, white, and delicious to those who drink it. It will neither dull their senses nor befuddle them. They shall sit with bashful, dark-eyed virgins, as chaste as the sheltered eggs of ostriches." (*The Koran*, translated by N.J. Dawood, Penguin Books, 37: 40, p. 170.)

As for the women in this world, even the believers among them must be subjected to a strict code of behavior, in obedience to a clearly defined hierarchy:

"Enjoin believing women to turn their eyes away from temptation and to preserve their chastity; to cover their adornments (except such as are normally

so is a husband the head of his wife; and as the Church submits to Christ, so should wives to their husbands, in everything.

Slaves must be respectful and obedient to their masters, not only when they are kind and gentle but also when they are unfair. You see, there is some merit in putting up with the pains of unearned punishment if it is done for the sake of God but there is nothing meritorious in taking a beating patiently if you have

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displayed); to draw their veils over their bosoms and not to reveal their finery except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their step-sons, their brothers, their slave girls; male attendants lacking in natural vigor, and children who have no carnal knowledge of women. And let them not stamp their feet in walking so as to reveal their hidden trinkets." (*The Koran*, 24:31, p. 216.)

And again, as regards women and slavery:

"Give orphans the property which belongs to them. Do not exchange their valuables for worthless things or cheat them of their possessions; for this would surely be a great sin. If you fear that you cannot treat orphans [orphan girls — B.A.] with fairness, then you may marry other women who seem good to you: two, three, or four of them. But if you fear that you cannot maintain equality among them, marry one only or any slave girls you may own. This will make it easier for you to avoid injustice." (*The Koran*, 4:2, p. 366.)

Clearly, such concepts as justice, fairness, equality, virtue, etc., advocated here reflect very definite social relations and have a clear-cut class character.

Similarly, Confucius and the Confucian Way, which promote such virtues as righteousness and benevolence, originally came forward as defenders of the slave system in ancient China and have served ever since to further and reinforce class exploitation and oppression. It is rather obvious what the benevolence and righteousness advocated in the following citations from Confucius are meant to achieve and whose interests they are meant to benefit:

"The Master said, The gentleman is dignified, but never haughty; common people are haughty, but never dignified."

"The Master said, Govern the people by regulations, keep order among them by chastisements, and they will flee from you, and lose all self-respect. Govern them by moral force, keep order among them by ritual and they will keep self-respect and come to you of their own accord."

"The Master said, Where gentlemen set their hearts upon moral force, the commoners set theirs upon the soil. Where gentlemen think only of punishments, the commoners think only of exemptions." (*The Analects of Con-*

done something wrong to deserve it. The merit, in the sight of God, is in bearing it patiently when you are punished after doing your duty.<sup>57</sup>

Or let's look at some of the leading representatives of the bourgeoisie when it was on the rise in Europe over several centuries, leading up to the nineteenth, and was playing overall a progressive, even revolutionary role. Martin Luther, for example, was the leading figure in the Protestant Reformation (rebellion against the Catholic Church), which was generally associated with early bourgeois opposition to the feudal order. It was also accompanied by massive peasant rebellions, which shook heaven and earth in the Germany of Luther's time (the

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*Lucius*, translated and annotated by Arthur Waley, Vintage Books, Book XIII, 26; Book II, 3; Book IV, 11; pp. 178, 88, 104.)

And, as pointed out by the revolutionary forces in China in the struggle to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius shortly before the reactionary coup which brought the current revisionist rulers to power, Confucius and his disciples insisted that " 'those who labor with their minds govern others; those who labor with their strength are governed by others' "; and with regard to women, "They formulated many reactionary dogmas such as the 'Three Obediences and Four Virtues' (obedience to the father and elder brothers when young, obedience to the husband when married, and obedience to the sons when widowed; women's virtue, speech, appearance and chores)." ( See "Carry the Struggle to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius Through to the End," and "Working Women's Struggle Against Confucianism in Chinese History," in *And Mao Makes 5*, edited with an introduction by R. Lotta [Banner Press, Chicago, 1978], pp. 107, 125.) For a vivid illustration of the fact that the Hindu religion is founded on similar reactionary precepts, see "The Hindu Case Against Women," a letter from "A Reader in India," in the *Revolutionary Worker*, No. 204, May 6, 1983.

Here again what stands out is that the precepts and principles — the notions of justice, wisdom, righteousness, benevolence and so forth — expounded in these philosophical systems (or religions) are shaped by and reflect the material conditions and social relations of the age and society in which their authors lived, but more than that, they reflect and serve the interests of certain class forces, in particular among the upper and ruling classes. Once again what is powerfully illustrated is the truth that, in whatever part of the world and with whatever specific features the society, the nation, etc., possess, all ways of thinking in class society, without exception, are indeed stamped with the brand of a class.

<sup>57</sup> Paul, Ephesians 5:21-25, and 1 Peter 2:18-20, *The Jerusalem Bible* (Doubleday & Company, Inc.) — for a more thorough exposure of this, especially in relation to the oppression of women, see the *Revolutionary Worker*, No. 195, March 4, 1983.

first part of the sixteenth century). Luther, however, consistent with the position of a bourgeoisie which was not yet strong enough or prepared to make a thoroughgoing challenge to the feudal order and which feared the upheaval of the peasants which was erupting beyond all bounds, viciously turned on the peasant rebels and supported the most ruthless suppression of them. This is vividly shown in the following remarks by Luther:

Now he who would confuse these two kingdoms — as our false fanatics do — would put wrath into God's kingdom and mercy into the world's kingdom; and that is the same as putting the devil in heaven and God in hell. Both of these things these sympathizers with the peasants would like to do. First they wanted to go to work with the sword, fight for the Gospel as "Christian brethren," and kill other people, when it was these others' duty to be merciful and patient. Now that the kingdom of the world has overcome them, they want to have mercy in it; that is to say, they would endure no worldly kingdom, but would not grant God's kingdom to anyone. Can you imagine anything more perverse? Not so, dear friends! If one has deserved wrath in the kingdom of the world, let him submit, and either take his punishment, or humbly sue for pardon. . . .<sup>58</sup>

John Calvin, a contemporary of Luther and another leading figure in early Protestantism — and also associated with the rise of the bourgeoisie at that time — insisted on strict observance of religious doctrine, as interpreted by him, and an ascetic lifestyle among his followers. As one editor noted in introducing excerpts from Calvin's teachings:

Though not a theocracy, in the strict sense of clerical government, the Geneva regime [established by Calvin — B.A.] closely resembled it, for civil officials enforced the decisions on morality made by the Consistory. Its control was severe and thorough. Its intolerance was demonstrated by the burning of Servetus for theological differences on the Trinity. . . .

But Calvinism had its politically progressive side also. It demanded an educated, literate people who could read and

<sup>58</sup> Martin Luther, "Extract from *An Open Letter Concerning the Hard Book Against the Peasants, 1525*," in Curtis, ed., *The Great Political Theories*, Vol. 1, p. 246.

understand their Bible and ministers. . . . In economics, Calvin's attitude was more progressive than Luther's. He might object to some kinds of business, but clearly recognized the value of production and trade, and introduced the manufacture of cloth and watches in Geneva. The injunction to work hard, to limit spending, meant accumulation of capital, the foundation of modern industry. Profit-making was legitimate, although profits were to be devoted to public works. "Calvin," said R.H. Tawney, "did for the sixteenth century bourgeoisie what Marx did for the nineteenth century proletariat."<sup>59</sup>

Although the last statement (by Tawney) above is something of a distortion and exaggeration — and while the more correct analogy to Calvin might be the utopian socialists like Owen with their experimental communes — nevertheless the basic analysis above is an accurate summation of Calvin's ideas and role, as indicated by Calvin's own statements, such as his injunctions that "every person may enjoy his property without molestation; that men may transact their business together without fraud and injustice; that integrity and modesty may be cultivated among them"; and so on.<sup>60</sup>

For a final example, let's turn to Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose ideas exerted a great influence on the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, the most radical and thoroughgoing bourgeois revolution in history. In his major work, *The Social Contract*, Rousseau writes:

What man loses by the social contract is his natural liberty and an unlimited right to everything he tries to get and succeeds in getting; what he gains is civil liberty and the proprietorship of all he possesses. If we are to avoid mistakes in weighing one against the other, we must clearly distinguish natural liberty, which is bounded only by the strength of the individual, from civil liberty, which is limited by the general will; and possession, which is merely the effect of force or the right of the first occupier, from property, which can be founded only on a

<sup>59</sup> In Curtis, ed., *The Great Political Theories*, Vol. 1, p. 237.

<sup>60</sup> John Calvin, in *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 256.

positive title. . . .

I have already defined civil liberty; by equality, we should understand, not that the degrees of power and riches are to be absolutely identical for everybody, but that power shall never be great enough for violence, and shall always be exercised by virtue of rank and law; and that, in respect of riches, no citizen shall ever be wealthy enough to buy another, and none poor enough to be forced to sell himself; which implies, on the part of the great, moderation in goods and position, and, on the side of the common sort, moderation in avarice and covetousness.<sup>61</sup>

Here, besides the general idealist outlook — the attempt to establish ahistorical categories of natural liberty and civil liberty, possession and property, and to fashion eternal principles for the regulation of society — what is reflected is the fact that Rousseau is viewing human society (and nature) through the eyeglasses of a particular society where the level of development of the productive forces does not allow for a system of outright chattel slavery but demands a different form of class division and oppression; and more particularly Rousseau reproduces as abstract political principles the economic-social relations of commodity production and exchange and the interests of the class whose interests correspond to a society where commodity production and exchange are generalized and the laws inherent in this are given full expression — the bourgeoisie and capitalist society (this is also manifested even in the title Rousseau chooses, the social *contract*).<sup>62</sup>

Engels, in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, very penetratingly revealed the relation between the ideology guiding the French Revolution generally and the material relations of which these guiding philosophical and political principles were the reflection, providing a powerful example of the application of historical materialism. It is worth quoting at length:

The great men, who in France prepared men's minds for the coming revolution, were themselves extreme revolutionists.

<sup>61</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, in *ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 21, 27.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 19, emphasis added.

They recognized no external authority of any kind whatever. Religion, natural science, society, political institutions — everything was subjected to the most unsparing criticism: everything must justify its existence before the judgment-seat of reason or give up existence. Reason became the sole measure of everything. It was the time when, as Hegel says, the world stood upon its head; first in the sense that the human head, and the principles arrived at by its thought, claimed to be the basis of all human action and association; but by and by, also, in the wider sense that the reality which was in contradiction to these principles had, in fact, to be turned upside down. Every form of society and government then existing, every old traditional notion was flung into the lumber-room as irrational; the world had hitherto allowed itself to be led solely by prejudices; everything in the past deserved only pity and contempt. Now, for the first time, appeared the light of day, the kingdom of reason; henceforth superstition, injustice, privilege, oppression, were to be superseded by eternal truth, eternal Right, equality based on Nature and the inalienable rights of man.

We know today that this kingdom of reason was nothing more than the idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisie; that this eternal Right found its realization in bourgeois justice; that this equality reduced itself to bourgeois equality before the law; that bourgeois property was proclaimed as one of the essential rights of man; and that the government of reason, the Contrat Social of Rousseau, came into being, and only could come into being, as a democratic bourgeois republic. The great thinkers of the eighteenth century could, no more than their predecessors, go beyond the limits imposed upon them by their epoch.<sup>63</sup>

Marx gives another penetrating, and humorous, example of the principles of historical materialism in their application to the genesis of capitalist society in Volume 1 of *Capital*. He refers to an E.G. Wakefield, whose "colonization theory. . . England tried for a time to enforce by Acts of Parliament," and remarks that, "It is the great merit of E.G. Wakefield to have discovered, not anything new about the Colonies, but to have discovered in

<sup>63</sup> Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Chap. 1, *MESW*, Vol. 3, pp. 115-116.

the Colonies the truth as to the conditions of capitalist production in the mother-country."<sup>64</sup> Wakefield, Marx continued, "discovered that in the Colonies, property in money, means of subsistence, machines, and other means of production, does not yet stamp a man as a capitalist if there be wanting the correlative — the wage worker, the other man who is compelled to sell himself of his own free will. He discovered that capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons, established by the instrumentality of things." Wakefield had recounted the story of a wealthy Englishman, a Mr. Peel, who packed up for Swan River, West Australia, taking with him not only 50,000 British pounds, but 3,000 working class men, women and children whom Peel intended to make his wage workers in capitalist production in Australia. But capitalist relations had not yet been firmly established there, and when they arrived, the 3,000 ran off, leaving Peel "without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river." "<sup>65</sup> "Unhappy Mr. Peel," Marx says in summation — he thought of everything, brought money to be capital and people to be wage slaves with him, but he could not bring capitalist relations with him as well — he "provided for everything except the export of English modes of production to Swan River!"<sup>66</sup>

Here, indirectly and among other things, what Marx is refuting is the theory which continues to have considerable currency — both in the realm of more formal political theses and in various popular notions — that classes, exploitation and oppression are to be explained not by reference to the economic foundation of society — and especially the level of development of the productive forces — but to political relations and ideas and specifically tendencies toward aggression, selfishness, etc., that are inherent and unchanging (and unchangeable) in people. This is akin to and in general a part of the theory of "human nature," which argues that a society without exploitation and class divi-

<sup>64</sup> Marx, *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), Vol. 1, p. 766.

<sup>65</sup> E.G. Wakefield, "England and America," Vol. ii, p. 33, cited in *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

sion and oppression is impossible, pointing to the fact that throughout history whatever the particular form of society or level of its development, these things have been present or have sooner or later emerged. Engels directly refuted this line of argument in *Anti-Dühring*:

The cleavage of society into an exploiting and an exploited class, a ruling and an oppressed class, was the necessary outcome of the previous low development of production. Society is necessarily divided into classes as long as the total social labor only yields a product but slightly exceeding what is necessary for the bare existence of all, as long as labor therefore claims all or almost all of the time of the great majority of the members of society. Side by side with this great majority exclusively enthralled in toil, a class freed from direct productive labor is formed which manages the general business of society: the direction of labor, affairs of state, justice, science, art, and so forth. . . .

But if, upon this showing, division into classes has a certain historical justification, it does so only for a given period of time, for given social conditions. It was based on the insufficiency of production; it will be swept away by the full development of the modern productive forces. In fact the abolition of social classes presupposes a level of historical development at which the existence not merely of this or that particular ruling class but of any ruling class at all, and therefore of class distinction itself, has become an anachronism, is obsolete. It therefore presupposes that the development of production has reached a level at which the appropriation of the means of production and of the products, and consequently of political supremacy and of the monopoly of education and intellectual leadership by a special social class, has become not only superfluous but also a hindrance to development economically, politically and intellectually.

This point has now been reached.<sup>67</sup>

As for the notion of the political "original sin" whereby man first subdued and enslaved another man (not to mention woman), thus beginning the whole tragic course of human history, Engels

<sup>67</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Part 3: "Socialism," Section 2: "Theoretical," pp. 364-365.

points out that even slavery itself was not possible until production had developed to the point where a surplus beyond mere subsistence was possible (in another work, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels makes the same fundamental point with regard to the oppression of women — see Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Volume 3). "The subjugation of a man to menial service in all its forms," Engels stressed,

presupposes that the subjugator has at his disposal the means of labor through which alone he can employ the person placed in bondage, and in the case of slavery, in addition, the means of subsistence which enable him to keep the slave alive. In all cases, therefore, it already presupposes the possession of a certain amount of property in excess of the average. How did this property come into existence? In any case it is clear that it may have been robbed and therefore may be based on *force*, but that this is by no means necessary. It may have been obtained by labor, by theft, by trade or by fraud. Nevertheless, *it must have been obtained by labor before there was any possibility of its being robbed.*<sup>68</sup>

It must have first been obtained by labor before it could be robbed; production must have developed to a certain level, capable of creating a surplus beyond subsistence before the division of society into classes, exploitation and oppression — whose seeds or germs were present in primitive society, fundamentally because of the low level of development of the productive forces — could flower. And, in turn, a certain, far higher level of development of the productive forces must have been attained before the basis was finally created for the complete elimination of class distinctions, exploitation and oppression.

As Engels noted, that point has now been reached, the era of achieving this historic goal has now begun. It is an era which has already been marked and is bound to be increasingly marked by tremendous upheaval and cataclysmic confrontation, is bound to witness the achievement of that goal only through tumultuous

<sup>68</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Part 2: "Political Economy," Section 2: "The Force Theory," pp. 205-206, first emphasis in original, the second added.

struggle following a tortuous course. This has everything to do with the nature of the goal itself — the most radical rupture with traditional property relations and traditional ideas — a goal demanding the most conscious, thoroughgoing, sustained and determined revolutionary effort. It is for this reason that in refuting the "force theory" of Dühring (and others) Engels went on to insist:

For Herr Dühring force is the absolute evil. . . . That force, however, plays yet another role in history, a revolutionary role; that, in the words of Marx, it is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one, that it is the instrument by means of which social movement forces its way through and shatters the dead, fossilized political forms — of this there is not a word in Herr Dühring. It is only with sighs and groans that he admits the possibility that force will perhaps be necessary for the overthrow of the economy based on exploitation — alas! because all use of force, forsooth, demoralizes the person who uses it. And this in spite of the immense moral and spiritual advance which has been the result of every victorious revolution! . . . It is this preachers' mentality, dull, insipid and impotent, that claims the right to impose itself on the most revolutionary party history has known!<sup>69</sup>

## II. Marxism in its Development into Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought

### 1. Leninism: fundamental departure or decisive advance?

As has been indicated, the emergence and development of Marxism itself has been an illustration of the basic principles of Marxism. First of all this development has been a reflection of developments and changes in the material world, society in par-

<sup>69</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Part 2: "Political Economy," Section 4: "Force Theory (Concluded)," pp. 235-236.

ticular. One of the salient examples of this is that Marx and Engels, after the experience of the Paris Commune, placed great emphasis on the lesson that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes" but must break up the old state machinery and replace it with the organs of power of the armed proletarians themselves.<sup>70</sup> But beyond that, just as things in nature and society do not develop in a linear way, proceeding instead through spiral-like motion and marked at decisive points by leaps and ruptures, so too the development of Marxism has not been straight-line or without the discarding of theses and conceptions that have become outdated, or have proved to be incorrect, and their replacement by new and more correct theories and policies. As I wrote in *Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions*:

It can be further said that it is even a law of revolution, and especially of proletarian revolution, that in order for it to succeed in any particular country, the struggle in that country and those leading it will have to depart from and even oppose certain particular conceptions or previous practices which have come to be invested with the stature of "established norms" in the revolutionary movement. This is an expression of materialist dialectics, because every revolution arises out of the concrete conditions (contradictions) in the country (and the world) at the time it is occurring, and every new revolution inevitably involves new questions, new contradictions to be resolved. It is the basic principles and the method of Marxism-Leninism that must be applied as a universal guide for revolution — but these, too, are constantly being developed and enriched, just because scientific knowledge is constantly being deepened, including the Marxist-Leninist comprehension of reality in the fullest sense, and because reality is constantly undergoing change, which requires and calls forth the continuous deepening of this knowledge.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> See Marx, *The Civil War in France* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), "Address of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association on the Civil War in France, 1871," Part 3, p. 64; and Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, "Preface to the German Edition of 1872," p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Avakian, *Mao's Immortal*, p. 312.

It is therefore not surprising that in leading the first successful proletarian revolution — the first consolidation of power by the proletariat, making possible and followed by the basic socialist transformation of ownership of the means of production — Lenin had to challenge and reject certain parts of what had become the "conventional wisdom" in the Marxist movement and had to not merely apply the body of Marxist thought as it had been handed down so far but develop it further. It is because of this basic fact that the question which stands as the heading of this section can be and has been raised: does Leninism represent a fundamental departure from or a decisive advance of Marxism? The answer, which this section will illustrate, is clearly the latter. Lenin did subject to criticism and oppose certain precepts and practices within the body of Marxism and the Marxist movement, but he did so *on the basis of Marxism*.

Lenin had the necessity not only to develop Marxism but also to defend and apply its basic principles — and in fact without this it would have been impossible to develop them. One important example of this is in the realm of philosophy. In the years leading up to the 1917 revolutions in Russia, Lenin devoted considerable attention to the question of dialectics, restudying a number of works by Hegel as well as others, including Marx and Engels of course. In the course of this study and applying ideas generated through it to the problems of the revolution in Russia and the world communist movement, Lenin enriched Marxist, that is materialist, dialectics (this will be returned to later). But several years prior to that Lenin had fought a great battle on the philosophical front against erstwhile supporters of the revolution and Marxism who had fundamentally called into question the materialist viewpoint, raising idealist and shamefaced idealist — in particular, agnostic — arguments in refutation of materialism. In part, the desertion of these people from the camp of materialism was owing to recent discoveries in physics, which indicated, for instance, the existence of electrons where previously the atom had been thought to be the smallest particle of matter and an indivisible whole and which demonstrated that mass can be transformed into energy (and vice versa). This created a "crisis

in physics" and led to the conclusion among many that "matter has disappeared." Lenin's struggle against these tendencies on the philosophical front was systematized in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (written in 1908), which is itself a major contribution to Marxist philosophy, including in its explanation of how the scientists and philosophers who were abandoning materialism were doing so because they had not grasped dialectics and therefore were not thoroughlygoingly materialist, were incapable of grasping how the recent discoveries in physics confirmed and deepened the principles of dialectical materialism. At the same time, however, Lenin also exposed how the vacillations and desertions of the former Marxists and fellow travelers of Marxism, in Russia in particular, were explained not only by these recent scientific discoveries and their ramifications in the philosophical realm but in large part by the defeat of the 1905 Revolution in Russia and the period of reaction and deadening lull in the revolutionary movement that followed this defeat. In these circumstances the defense of the basic principles of Marxism, in particular of dialectical materialism, became decisive.

I am not attempting to set up some mechanical formula whereby it is necessary first — and literally in the sense of time sequence — to defend Marxism in some particular field and only then can one contribute to developing it in that field (nor is it possible or my purpose here to thoroughly review the struggle Lenin waged against empirio-criticism on the philosophical front — for that I refer the reader to the chapter on philosophy in my book *Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions* and to *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* itself). The point, however, is that there is a necessary unity between upholding and enriching the principles of Marxism, which is demonstrated by Lenin's work and struggle on the philosophical front as well as in other spheres.

"What is now happening to Marx's theory," Lenin wrote only months before the October 1917 Revolution in Russia,

has, in the course of history, happened repeatedly to the theories of revolutionary thinkers and leaders of oppressed classes fighting for emancipation. During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them,

received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to hallow their names to a certain extent for the "consolation" of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it.<sup>12</sup>

Specifically at that time, this general phenomenon (which today finds concentrated expression in the deceptions of the revisionist rulers of the self-proclaimed, and formerly, socialist countries, above all the Soviet Union and China) was manifested in the machinations of the social-democrats, especially those generally identified with Karl Kautsky, who was then still the leading authority on Marxism and the "elder statesman" of the Second International and specifically of the German Social-Democratic Party, the largest and most prestigious "Marxist" party at that time. Kautsky's opportunist tendencies had fully blossomed with the outbreak of World War 1, when he adopted a social-chauvinist, "defend the fatherland" position — adding the perverted twist that true internationalism meant recognizing the right of socialists in all the belligerent countries to defend the fatherland! Lenin waged a relentless struggle to expose and defeat Kautsky's rationalizations for social-chauvinism and the ways in which they covered for more blatant versions of the same pro-imperialist "socialism." With Kautsky, as with the great majority of parties in the Second International which also adopted a social-chauvinist stand, this aspect of their opportunism went hand in hand not only with a general betrayal of Marxism but specifically with a distortion and perversion of the Marxist position on the state. This question — of the state and revolution, as Lenin formulated it — became then a sharp dividing line between Marxism and opportunism, and "In these circumstances, in view of the unprecedentedly widespread distortion of Marxism," Lenin argued, "our prime task is to *re-establish* what Marx really taught on the subject

<sup>12</sup> Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, CW, Vol. 25, p. 390, emphasis in original.



of the state."<sup>73</sup>

Thus, in *The State and Revolution*, with the use of extensive citations from the writings of Marx (and Engels) on this question, Lenin drove home from many different angles the essence of the Marxist teaching on the state: that the state arose at a certain point in the development of society — when classes and class antagonisms emerged; that the state has always been and by its nature must be an instrument of class oppression; that the bourgeois state no less than the forms of state preceding it is a dictatorship over the exploited majority (the proletariat in bourgeois society); that it can only be abolished by a violent revolution; that it must be broken up and replaced through this revolution by the dictatorship of the proletariat; and finally that this dictatorship is radically different from all previous forms of class rule in that it represents, for the first time, the dictatorship of the formerly exploited majority over the minority of exploiters and that this dictatorship of the proletariat must and will wither away — but only when the basis for this class dictatorship has been eliminated with the elimination of class distinctions themselves. All this it was necessary to re-establish, as Lenin said, because the opportunists, who had hegemony in the socialist movement at that time, sought to distort and deny it and to present the bourgeois state in particular not as a class dictatorship but as a democratic form through which all classes, equally, could vie for influence and through which, further, the proletariat could eventually gain the upper hand in society and (more or less) peacefully institute socialism.

However, on this question, as on the question of "defense of the fatherland,"

the "Kautskyite" distortion of Marxism is far more subtle. "Theoretically," it is not denied that the state is an organ of class rule, or that class antagonisms are irreconcilable.<sup>74</sup>

But what was denied was the conclusion that Marxism draws from this: the need for the violent overthrow of the bourgeois

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 391, emphasis in original.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 393.

state and the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus — of any apparatus of state power other than that of the armed masses themselves, the proletarian dictatorship, which itself will finally wither away. "We have already said above, and shall show more fully later," Lenin wrote,

that the theory of Marx and Engels of the inevitability of a violent revolution refers to the bourgeois state. The latter *cannot* be superseded by the proletarian state (the dictatorship of the proletariat) through the process of "withering away," but, as a general rule, only through a violent revolution. . . . The necessity of systematically imbuing the masses with *this* and precisely this view of violent revolution lies at the root of the *entire* theory of Marx and Engels. The betrayal of their theory by the now prevailing social-chauvinist and Kautskyite trends expresses itself strikingly in both these trends ignoring *such* propaganda and agitation.<sup>75</sup>

#### And Kautsky

refrained from analyzing the utter distortion of Marxism by opportunism on this point. He cited the above-quoted passage from Engels' preface to Marx's *Civil War* and said that according to Marx the working class cannot *simply* take over the *ready-made* state machinery, but that, generally speaking, it *can* take it over — and that was all. . . .

The result was that the most essential distinction between Marxism and opportunism on the subject of the tasks of the proletarian revolution was slurred over by Kautsky! . . .

Let us take the next, more mature, work by Kautsky, which was also largely devoted to a refutation of opportunist errors. It is his pamphlet, *The Social Revolution*. In this pamphlet, the author chose as his special theme the question of "the proletarian revolution" and "the proletarian regime." He gave much that was exceedingly valuable, but he *avoided* the question of the state. Throughout the pamphlet the author speaks of the winning of state power — and no more; that is, he has chosen a formula which makes a concession to the opportunists, inasmuch as it *admits* the possibility of seizing power *without* destroying the state machine. The very thing which Marx in 1872 declared to be

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 405, emphasis in original.

"obsolete" in the programme of the *Communist Manifesto*, is revived by Kautsky in 1902.<sup>76</sup>

The result was that, despite his attempts to occupy the centrist position, to criticize and wriggle between those upholding the revolutionary essence of Marxism on the one hand and outright opportunists on the other, Kautsky ended up openly expressing the most craven opportunism and slavish bourgeois parliamentarianism. Even before the outbreak of World War 1 and the full degeneration of Kautsky's views, he had insisted in a polemic with a representative of the "Left radical trend" in the socialist movement that the mass strike was a powerful weapon that must be used by the workers against the government but that the object of the mass strike

cannot be to *destroy* the state power; its only object can be to make the government compliant on some specific question, or to replace a government hostile to the proletariat by one willing to meet it half-way . . . . But never, under no circumstances, can it (that is, the proletarian victory over a hostile government) lead to the *destruction* of the state power; it can lead only to a certain *shifting* of the balance of forces *within the state power* . . . .<sup>77</sup>

And the conclusion, leaving no room for doubt in which camp Kautsky stands:

The aim of our political struggle remains, as in the past, the conquest of state power by winning a majority in parliament and by raising parliament to the rank of master of the government.<sup>78</sup>

It must be brought up here that in putting forward such a position Kautsky did not rely exclusively on the distortion of the

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 483-484, emphasis in original. How much, and in what ways, opportunism of the Kautskyite type is revived and trumpeted by revisionists of our time — this is a subject that cries out for discussion, but it will be better left for later, when a more all-around basis has been laid and it can be indicated in its full dimension.

<sup>77</sup> Kautsky, cited in Lenin, *ibid.*, p. 494, emphasis, ellipses, explanation in parenthesis in original.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Marxist teaching on the state; he was also able to make use of certain formulations that had been put forward by Engels in particular. More specifically, in his "Introduction" to Marx's essay *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850*, writing shortly before his death in 1895, Engels gave some grist to the mill of the advocates of the peaceful transition to socialism through the parliamentary road. Reviewing recent developments in the military sphere he argued that these changes had all been "in favor of the military" (that is, the armed forces of the state) and that "on the other hand, all the conditions of the insurgents' side have grown worse."<sup>79</sup> Now Engels did not draw from this the conclusion that the eventual armed struggle to overthrow the bourgeois state was impossible or that it should be abandoned as a general strategic principle. In fact he asked and answered the question, "Does that mean that in the future street fighting will no longer play any role? Certainly not." Rather, he went on,

It only means that the conditions since 1848 have become far more unfavorable for civilian fighters and far more favorable for the military. In future, street fighting can, therefore, be victorious only if the disadvantageous situation is compensated by other factors. Accordingly, it will occur more seldom in the beginning of a great revolution than in its further progress, and will have to be undertaken with greater forces. These, however, may then well prefer, as in the whole great French Revolution or on September 4 and October 31, 1870, in Paris, the open attack to the passive barricade tactics.<sup>80</sup>

It would certainly be a gross injustice to label Engels' position here opportunist, but there is revealed in his discussion of this point a tendency to treat the military aspect in an exaggerated and somewhat metaphysical way — one-sidedly, statically, absolutely.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps ironically, this tendency to exaggerate the military

<sup>79</sup> Engels, "Introduction" to Marx, *The Class Struggles in France*, p. 20.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>81</sup> This is a tendency for which Marx had criticized Engels on at least one important occasion, in reference to the U.S. Civil War, when at an early point in that war, Engels doubted the possibility of the North's victory. Marx, writing Engels

sphere led Engels to underrate the possibility and variety of revolutionary warfare against the armed forces of the reactionary state. And this went along with a tendency to treat the question of what could be achieved through the peaceful — and in particular the parliamentary — form of struggle in an exaggerated and somewhat metaphysical way as well. One cannot help getting the impression that Engels, as reflected in this "Introduction," became a bit intoxicated by the successes of the Social-Democratic Party in Germany, even to the point of entertaining the notion of the achievement of socialism there without violence or at least without the massive violence characteristic of revolutionary civil war. Thus, although he says that neither in Germany nor in other countries is the "right to revolution" renounced by the socialists, he goes on to argue that

whatever may happen in other countries, the German Social-Democracy occupies a special position and therewith, at least in the immediate future, has a special task. The two million voters whom it sends to the ballot box, together with the young men and women who stand behind them as non-voters, form the most numerous, most compact mass, the decisive "shock force" of the international proletarian army. This mass already supplies over a fourth of the votes cast; and as the by-elections to the *Reichstag*, the Diet elections in individual states, the municipal council and trades court elections demonstrate, it increases incessantly. Its growth proceeds as spontaneously, as steadily, as irresistibly, and at the same time as tranquilly as a natural process. All government intervention has proved powerless against it. We can count even today on two and a quarter million voters. If it continues in this fashion, by the end of the century we shall conquer the greater part of the middle strata of society, petty bourgeois and small peasants, and grow into the decisive power

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that "I do not entirely share your views on the American Civil War," points out that Engels has failed to fully grasp the political basis for the temporary military difficulties of the North. Marx suggests, for example, that, "A single Negro regiment would have a remarkable effect on Southern nerves," and he concludes, "The long and the short of the story seems to me to be that a war of this kind must be conducted on revolutionary lines, while the Yankees have so far been trying to conduct it on constitutional lines." See "Marx to Engels in Manchester" (August 7, 1862), in Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 124-125.

in the land, before which all other powers will have to bow, whether they like it or not."<sup>82</sup>

Engels, again, does not renounce the armed struggle but he presents the dialectic leading to it as one in which the parties of order are themselves forced to initiate the armed combat because of the ever increasing gains of the socialists at the ballot box and the growing threat this poses to the established order. Engels argues that it is the actual course of events in the real world that makes possible and justifies such a tactical orientation — it is a case where "The irony of world history turns everything upside down," and

We, the "revolutionists," the "overthrowers" — we are thriving far better on legal methods than on illegal methods and overthrow. The parties of Order, as they call themselves, are perishing under the legal conditions created by themselves. . . . And if we are not so crazy as to let ourselves be driven to street fighting in order to please them, then in the end there is nothing left for them to do but themselves break through this fatal legality."<sup>83</sup>

Unfortunately, however, it was not "the irony of world history" but Engels' own assessment of and approach to the situation that was "turning everything upside down." Engels did not recognize that in the orientation of the German Social-Democratic Party was what Lenin later referred to as a deep abscess of opportunism, that the successes of that party were only covering up that opportunist infection and that these successes were to a very great degree more apparent than real — when viewed, at least, in relation to the goal which Engels, unlike Kautsky and others, never abandoned, the goal of actually abolishing capitalism, replacing it with the rule of the workers and carrying out the transition to communism. Lenin called attention to the fact that Kautsky himself, in a pamphlet he wrote in 1909, expressed the concern that, "The present situation is fraught with the danger that we [i.e., the Ger-

<sup>82</sup> Engels, "Introduction" to Marx, *The Class Struggles in France*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

man Social-Democrats) may easily appear to be more 'moderate' than we really are."<sup>84</sup> On this Lenin commented: "It turned out that in reality the German Social-Democratic Party was much more moderate and opportunist than it appeared to be!"<sup>85</sup>

Having called attention to some significant errors on Engels' part and to the fact that these errors were themselves opportunized on by opportunists, it is important to note that Engels put up some sharp struggle against important aspects of this, including the way in which the "Introduction" in question was reproduced in chopped-up form to highlight the parts emphasizing the gains and possibilities at the ballot box and, as Engels wrote to Kautsky at the time, to make Engels "appear as a peaceful worshipper of legality at any price."<sup>86</sup> In another letter, written two days later, Engels contrasts his position with the opportunist distortion of it:

... Liebknecht has just played me a nice trick. He has taken from my *Introduction* to Marx's articles on France of 1848-50 everything that could serve him to support the tactics of *peace at any price and of opposition to force and violence*, which it has pleased him for some time now to preach, especially at present when coercive laws are being prepared in Berlin. But I am preaching these tactics only for *the Germany of today* and even then *with an important proviso*. In France, Belgium, Italy, and Austria these tactics could not be followed in their entirety and in Germany may become inapplicable tomorrow . . .<sup>87</sup>

The opportunist leaders of the German Social-Democratic Party (and generally of the Second International) had precisely made a principle out of the tactics of peace at any price and had become worshippers of bourgeois legality. In short, they had sunk to the position of bourgeois democrats, in the name of "socialism."

<sup>84</sup> Kautsky, quoted in Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, CW, Vol. 25, p. 487.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> "Engels to Karl Kautsky in Stuttgart" (April 1, 1895), in Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 461.

<sup>87</sup> "Engels to Paul Lafargue in Paris" (April 3, 1895), *ibid.*, emphasis and ellipses in original. It is significant that, despite Engels' objections, the leaders of the German Social-Democratic Party refused to print the full text of the "Introduction."

This reached its depths not only during the course of World War 1 in general but specifically with the victory of the proletarian revolution in Russia. For then people like Kautsky came out *against* the dictatorship of the proletariat in the infant Soviet Republic! As Lenin remarked, Kautsky himself even went so far as to claim that the Bolsheviks' insistence on the dictatorship of the proletariat "'rests upon a single word of Karl Marx's'" and that the Bolsheviks "'opportunistly recalled the little word' (that is literally what he says — *des Wörtchens!*) 'about the dictatorship of the proletariat which Marx once used in 1875 in a letter.'"<sup>88</sup> Lenin pointed out that Kautsky was a man who knew the writings of Marx almost by heart and had quotations from Marx stored in his head as well as his desk for use upon any occasion, and yet he could refer to the dictatorship of the proletariat as "a single word," even "the little word" that Marx used *once* in a letter! "Kautsky *must know*," Lenin wrote,

that both Marx and Engels, in their letters as well as in their published works, *repeatedly* spoke about the dictatorship of the proletariat, before and especially after the Paris Commune. Kautsky must know that the formula "dictatorship of the proletariat" is merely a more historically concrete and scientifically exact formulation of the proletariat's task of "smashing" the bourgeois state machine, about which both Marx and Engels, in summing up the experience of the Revolution of 1848, and still more so, of 1871, spoke *for forty years*, between 1852 and 1891.<sup>89</sup>

In fact, Kautsky's fundamental opposition to the dictatorship of the proletariat was revealed in his reference to the Bolsheviks' stand on this question as "contempt for democracy."<sup>90</sup> Kautsky tried either to banish the formulation dictatorship of the proletariat from the body of Marxism altogether (dismissing it, as we've seen, as a chance phrase or "little word" used once) or, failing that, to infuse it with a bourgeois-democratic content, reduc-

<sup>88</sup> Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, CW, Vol. 28, p. 233.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., emphasis in original.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

ing it to a mere "condition" in which the proletariat — or more properly, the social-democratic representatives of bourgeois socialism — have won a majority in parliament. In his essay, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* — which is both a scathing indictment of Kautsky's treachery and a sweeping approach to decisive questions confronting the revolutionary proletariat in destroying the old world and creating the new — Lenin showed that, as he put it, "Kautsky turned Marx into a common liberal," that Kautsky attempted to blur over the question about the class nature of the state with talk about democracy in general, covering over the fact that in class society democracy always has a definite class content — it is either democracy for the exploiters and oppression for the exploited masses or the reverse<sup>91</sup> — that there can be no such thing as equality between exploiters and exploited and that all Kautsky's talk about violations of democratic principles, contempt for democracy, etc., on the part of the Bolsheviks came down to the fact that Kautsky opposed the seizure of power by the proletariat and the establishment of its dictatorship in place of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie — opposed it not only in theory but in practice and specifically in the practical struggle of the newly victorious proletariat in Russia, which was then waging a life-and-death battle to preserve the state power it had won. In short, Kautsky preferred bourgeois democracy — which, as Lenin showed, is only a form of bourgeois dictatorship — to proletarian dictatorship.

Again, in his polemics against Kautsky as well as more generally in the struggle to defend the positions of the Bolsheviks on this crucial question — and the practical positions won by the proletariat in Russia, the achievement of the proletarian dictatorship in living reality there — Lenin relied to a large degree on upholding, or even re-establishing as he said, the teachings of Marx and Engels on the state, but he could not rely on this alone. It was necessary to break new ground in theory even as it was being broken in practical, political struggle. To focus on one key aspect

<sup>91</sup> Lenin also argued that with the achievement of classless society, democracy too would wither away — about this more later.

of this, in his defense of the exercise of proletarian dictatorship in Russia, and specifically of the dispersal of the parliamentary Constituent Assembly which the Bolsheviks carried out shortly after the October Revolution, Lenin could and did marshal the arguments of Marx and Engels concerning the class nature of democracy as ammunition for his insistence that "the interests of the revolution are higher than the formal rights of the Constituent Assembly" and that "the form of elections, the form of democracy, is one thing, and the class content of the given institution is another."<sup>92</sup> And in both *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* and *The State and Revolution* Lenin repeatedly returns to Marx's emphasis on the fact that the Paris Commune "was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time" to buttress his argument as to why the Soviets in Russia were the appropriate form for the exercise of political power by the proletariat there.<sup>93</sup> But the fact is that the Soviets were not the same institutions as existed in the short-lived Commune — the Soviets were the creations of the masses in struggle, even as the Commune had been, under different conditions (and let's not forget the Commune could not hold up against reactionary suppression). Nor did the manner in which the Bolsheviks led the seizure of and then the exercise of power conform in every way — even in every major aspect — to what had been done in the Commune and what Marx summed up from it. Even though Lenin drew extensively from and applied to the degree possible the lessons and even specific key measures of the Commune, almost from the beginning the Bolsheviks were forced to abandon or modify certain of these, such as universal suffrage — suffrage rights were restricted and specifically excluded the bourgeoisie after a fairly brief period. Even in seizing power the Bolsheviks, although they waited until they had won a majority in the Soviets in the main working-class centers, acted against the wishes of other influential "socialist parties" and certainly before they had

<sup>92</sup> Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, CW, Vol. 28, pp. 268-269.

<sup>93</sup> See, for example, *The State and Revolution*, CW, Vol. 25, p. 428.

won over a majority of the exploited, the great bulk of whom were peasants, not proletarians. This was entirely without precedent, and there were no writings by Marx and Engels to justify specifically this; in fact, certain things could be selectively cited in opposition — and were, as we have seen.

The point is not that Marx and Engels actually held positions opposed to what was done in the proletarian revolution in Russia. In fact, what Lenin did in leading that revolution was entirely consistent with the basic thrust and fundamental principles, the revolutionary heart and soul, of all of Marxism. But it also represented a deepening and further development of it, in theory and practice. Nothing less would have made possible, at the decisive moments, the recognition of the potential of the Soviets as a form through which to carry out the seizure and exercise of political power, the recognition of the possibility of starting and carrying through the insurrection to achieve this and an unswerving determination in carrying it out — in the face not only of the guns of the open enemy but the howls and backbiting of enemies in the rear, posing as "socialists" and "Marxists."

All this was closely related to Lenin's contributions to, his qualitative development of, Marxism in its treatment of the relation between the vanguard and the mass of the revolutionary class and the revolutionary movement. This was expressed generally in terms of the relationship between consciousness and spontaneity and found concentrated expression in the question of the party — its nature and role and, as an extension of that, its organizational principles — a struggle led by Lenin not only in defense of basic Marxist principles but against aspects of ossified "conventional wisdom" in the Marxist movement that metaphysically froze certain precepts and practices that had generally prevailed in the time of Marx and Engels, and in some cases were advocated by them, but were in large part imposed by necessity or were the reflection of primitiveness.

From early on in its development a fierce struggle raged within the Marxist movement in Russia over the question of the party. In organizational terms this centered around the question of whether the party should be a loose federation made up of

masses of workers active in the struggle — the strike movement in particular — regardless of their political tendencies, or a tightly structured, strongly centralized organization made up only of class-conscious revolutionaries with a core of professional revolutionaries (people whose full-time work was revolution, who were freed from working for a living and supported financially by the party if necessary). Already by the early 1900s opposing camps had formed within the fledgling Russian party (then called the Social-Democratic Labor Party) and Lenin was already being bitterly attacked as a "bureaucrat," an "autocrat," a "dictator," etc., for insisting on the latter type of party (for a clear and thorough description of this battle on the organizational front see "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," 1904, in Lenin's *Collected Works*, Volume 7). But the more fundamental issue at stake, of which the organizational differences were an expression, was whether or not the working-class movement should remain, or be reduced to, a trade union and reformist movement, with a socialist coloration, or whether it must be a revolutionary movement whose highest expression was the political and ultimately military struggle against the reactionary state power and for its overthrow. In *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin highlights this point through recounting a conversation with "a fairly consistent Economist":

We were discussing the pamphlet *Who Will Bring About the Political Revolution?* and we were very soon agreed that its principal defect was that it ignored the question of organization. We were beginning to think that we were in complete agreement with each other — but . . . as the conversation proceeded, it became clear that we were talking of different things. My interlocutor accused the author of ignoring strike funds, mutual aid societies, etc., whereas I had in mind an organization of revolutionaries as an essential factor in "bringing about" the political revolution. As soon as that disagreement became clear, I hardly remember a single question of principle upon which I was in agreement with the Economist!

What was the source of our disagreement? It was the fact that on questions of both organization and politics the Economists are forever lapsing from Social-Democracy [i.e., communism — B.A.] into trade unionism. The political struggle of Social-

Democracy is far more extensive and complex than the economic struggle of the workers against the employers and the government. Similarly (and indeed for that reason), the organization of a revolutionary Social-Democratic party must inevitably be of a *different* kind than the organizations of the workers designed for this struggle.<sup>94</sup>

*What Is To Be Done?* as a whole is a systematic, concentrated presentation of these differences, on the ideological, political and organizational levels. In it is reflected the core of the struggle that was to unfold between Marxism, as it was developed by Lenin (becoming Marxism-Leninism), and Social-Democracy as it fully degenerated into social-democracy (reformist bourgeois socialism and bourgeois democracy). It is not without reason that opportunists of this — and indeed of every — type, along with openly reactionary political commentators, analysts, scholars, “dissidents” from the Soviet empire, and even some honest but confused people who have taken radical political stands but have not yet overstepped the bounds of bourgeois democracy, all single out *What Is To Be Done?* for attack. In particular they focus on its insistence on distinguishing between the masses, and their spontaneous consciousness, on the one hand, and class-conscious revolutionaries on the other — and more specifically on the conclusion that there must be an organized vanguard of the proletariat, with a backbone of professional revolutionaries, that brings communist consciousness to the masses from outside the sphere of their immediate economic relations and their economic struggles. This orientation, it is said, is the source of the degeneration of the revolution in Russia, of the establishment of a “dictatorship of the party over the masses” and so on. At the same time it is a far greater problem that among those who consider themselves Marxist-Leninists and genuinely desire proletarian revolution and the triumph of

<sup>94</sup> Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), Chap. 4: “The Amateurishness of the Economists and the Organization of Revolutionaries,” Section B: “Organization of Workers and Organization of Revolutionaries,” pp. 137-138, ellipses in original.

socialism and ultimately communism — and this problem has a long history in the international communist movement — there is a widespread tendency to bury, ignore, belittle or “of course, but” *What Is To Be Done?*. In fact, it can be said without exaggeration that an enormous amount of good would be done for the international communist movement if everyone who considers themselves part of it began tomorrow by seriously studying (or restudying) *What Is To Be Done?*! For these reasons, while it is not possible here to thoroughly examine, or even to touch on, all the major questions connected with *What Is To Be Done?*, it seems important to summarize and answer at least some of the major objections that have been raised to this work, or to the application of its essential theses (and since our party itself, in the past, raised or adopted many of these objections, and criticized and discarded them only after experience had demonstrated that they, and not *What Is To Be Done?*, were fundamentally in error, I feel well qualified to undertake this!).

“Economism means reducing or limiting the struggle of the workers to the economic struggle — that, of course, is wrong, but the economic struggle is what the workers (or the mass of them) are presently engaged in and concerned with, so that is where we communists must focus our efforts, in order to raise the workers’ movement to the level of a revolutionary movement.” This is frequently raised by people who actually believe that they are opposing economism, but it is an almost classical statement of the economist position itself, almost literally the same argument that was the heart of *Lenin’s target* in *What Is To Be Done?*. The economists against whom Lenin polemicized insisted that “political agitation must follow economic agitation,” that the task at hand was “lending the economic struggle itself a political character” and that in any case “the economic struggle ‘is the most widely applicable means’ of drawing the masses into political struggle.” To this Lenin replied by showing that, in fact, the arena of politics and social life in general, the conflict between different class forces in all spheres of society — political, cultural, scientific, etc., as well as economic — provided the means or basis for what must be the heart of communist work:

comprehensive exposure of the system, around all major social questions and events, instilling in the masses a clear sense of class outlooks, interests and forces involved. The economic struggle is by no means the most widely applicable means, Lenin argued, it is only the most widely *applied*, which itself is a reflection of the influence of economism.<sup>95</sup>

"Lenin's position in *What Is To Be Done?* is correct in the circumstances in which it was raised, because the immediate fight then was not against the capitalist system but against the Tsarist autocracy, and this is the reason why Lenin insists on putting the political struggle — the struggle against the autocracy — in the forefront." In response to this argument it must be said that in *What Is To Be Done?* (as well as elsewhere) Lenin did stress that it was necessary first of all to overthrow the autocracy and that this would both intensify and provide a better ground for the contradiction and struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and he did cite this as one specific reason why the political struggle against the autocracy must then be put before and above all else. But this is not the only reason Lenin gives for emphasizing the political struggle, nor is it the most fundamental. This is made clear throughout *What Is To Be Done?*. It is undeniable, for example, that in the following statement Lenin is speaking in terms of general and fundamental principles and not merely of the particular situation in Tsarist Russia:

Social-Democracy represents the working class not in the latter's relation to only a given group of employers, but in its relation to all classes of modern society, to the state as an organized political force. Hence, it follows that Social-Democrats not only must not confine themselves entirely to the economic struggle; they must not even allow the organization of economic exposures to become the predominant part of their activities. We must actively take up the political education of the working class and the development of its political consciousness.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> See Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*, Chap. 3: "Trade-Unionist Politics and Social-Democratic Politics," particularly Section A.: "Political Agitation and Its Restriction by the Economists."

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70, emphasis added.

"Perhaps in certain countries, in the imperialist countries in particular, where the condition of the workers, or at least large parts of the workers in trade unions, is not one of impoverishment, focusing the attention of the workers on the economic struggle is wrong, even opportunist; but in many countries, particularly in the oppressed nations and dependent countries, the masses are in miserable, desperate conditions and therefore communists are compelled to pay more attention to the daily struggle of the masses for survival and to make the economic struggle their main focus in order to build a revolutionary movement." This is another argument that is heard as to why *What Is To Be Done?* cannot be "dogmatically" applied. It is true that economism in the imperialist countries is doubly treacherous: it not only degrades the communist movement to the level of trade-unionism, even more it promotes chauvinism among the workers in the imperialist country who, to one degree or another, receive some part of the spoils of imperialism's international robbery and plunder. But that does not make economism correct in the colonial and dependent countries!<sup>97</sup> In this connection it should be pointed out that while Tsarist Russia was imperialist, it was at the same time extremely backward and the masses of people, including masses of the workers, suffered from extreme poverty and desperate conditions. It was in large part because of these conditions that the economists wanted to focus the attention of the workers on their economic struggles — and it was precisely in these conditions that Lenin, while certainly not denying any importance to the economic struggle — if it was approached with revolutionary and not economist politics — relentlessly fought against the tendency to make it the center and starting point of communist work.

<sup>97</sup> In these countries the overall revolutionary movement and its guiding strategy will generally be different in important respects, and economist tendencies will assert themselves in some ways differently, than in the imperialist countries — this will be addressed shortly. But the basic principles and specifically the fact that the economic struggle must not be the main focus of communist work certainly applies here as well.



Another argument that has been made is that Lenin, as reflected in *What Is To Be Done?*, underestimated the creativity of the masses in struggle and the fact that through their struggle itself they bring forth new forms and methods which must not be dismissed as mere spontaneity but must be learned from, spread and generalized by the communists. On one level this argument is an absurdity. As already alluded to, Lenin recognized such a central thing as the Soviets as being fundamentally the creation of the masses in struggle — in fact revolutionary struggle in 1905 — and he gave leadership in summing up the lessons of this and popularizing them. And it was Lenin, after all, who above all recognized the potential of the Soviets as the form through which the masses could seize and exercise political power. But he also clearly recognized that, left to spontaneity (which means to the "tender mercies" of the bourgeoisie and opportunists) the Soviets would be crushed or transformed into an apparatus for restraining the revolutionary energy of the masses and stifling their political initiative — in short for keeping them suppressed and under bourgeois domination. Indeed, the Bolsheviks had to wage a fierce battle against this, and to win leadership from the Mensheviks and other opportunists within the Soviets. Clearly this is another case which demonstrates how destructive — of the revolutionary movement — it is to make a fetish of (or to use Lenin's phrases, worship or bow to) spontaneity. Thus on another level this argument can be recognized as a repetition of the economist arguments that Lenin fought against in the first place, and the whole of *What Is To Be Done?* stands as a powerful refutation of such arguments and their echoes in various forms.

There is also the tendency to pit Lenin's pamphlet "*Left-Wing" Communism, An Infantile Disorder* against *What Is To Be Done?*, or to act as if *What Is To Be Done?* has been superseded or "corrected" by "*Left-Wing" Communism*. I have elsewhere made some analysis of this latter pamphlet and its application by the international communist movement (broadly defined) — its fundamentally and predominantly correct theses and secondarily certain significant errors, but more than that its widespread

distortion and misapplication (see for example *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will*). What must be re-emphasized here is the context for and the essential question in "*Left-Wing" Communism*. Lenin himself makes this clear (for those with eyes to see it at least):

The main thing — not everything by a very long way, of course, but the main thing — has already been achieved in that the vanguard of the working class has been won over, in that it has ranged itself on the side of Soviet government against parliamentarism, on the side of the dictatorship of the proletariat against bourgeois democracy. Now all efforts, all attention, must be concentrated on the *next* step — which seems, and from a certain standpoint really is — less fundamental, but which, on the other hand, is actually closer to the practical carrying out of the task, namely: seeking the forms of *transition* or *approach* to the proletarian revolution.<sup>98</sup>

As is apparent not just in the above statement but throughout this pamphlet, Lenin was focusing on a situation where revolutionary conditions are on the horizon if not immediately present and where the urgent question is how to enable the broadest masses, who are suddenly and perhaps for the first time awakening to political life, to become convinced through their own experience of the necessity of revolution, of the correctness of the revolutionary program and the bankruptcy of all others, especially those of opportunists within the working-class movement. This is different, in important particulars, from the circumstances and questions that are focused on in *What Is To Be Done?*, but the fundamental principles expressed in both are the same — and in neither case advocate or express support for reformism and economism in particular (to greatly understate the point!).

There are undoubtedly other arguments that have been and will be raised against the central theses and thrust of *What Is To*

<sup>98</sup> Lenin, "*Left-Wing" Communism, An Infantile Disorder* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1970), Chap. 10: "Some Conclusions," p. 96, emphasis in original.

*Be Done?*, but I believe what has been said here, and more fundamentally *What Is To Be Done?* itself, can stand as an answer to them. It is true, however, that some of the more specific strategic and tactical conclusions Lenin drew in *What Is To Be Done?* — even some of the more important ones, such as all-around political exposure as the heart of communist work and the party newspaper as key to party work and party organization — are not applicable as such in certain situations. In particular, “in the colonial and dependent countries it is more generally and more frequently the case [than in the imperialist countries — B.A.] that there is both the possibility and the necessity to wage armed struggle as a major form of struggle well before the time that nationwide political power can be won, and in some circumstances it is both possible and necessary to make the armed struggle the main form of struggle for a fairly protracted period leading up to the winning of nationwide political power.”<sup>99</sup> Clearly, in the situation where armed struggle is the main form, it would obviously be wrong to try to make political exposure the main focus and the newspaper the main weapon. But this, again, does not negate but is a concentrated expression of the fundamental principles stressed by Lenin in *What Is To Be Done?* — concerning the relationship between consciousness and spontaneity, the vanguard and the masses, and the precedence that political struggle must take over economic struggle in the development of the revolutionary movement. In fact, one of the main forms, if not the main form, that economism takes in such a situation is the denial of the need to make the armed struggle — which after all is political struggle which has gone over to its highest form — the main form of struggle, arguing that it is necessary first, and for an extended period, to participate in, perhaps even win leadership of, the struggles of the masses for

<sup>99</sup> *Basic Principles For The Unity Of Marxist-Leninists And For The Line Of The International Communist Movement*, A Draft Position Paper for Discussion Prepared by Leaders of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Chile and the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, paragraph 212 (available from RCP Publications, Chicago).

their daily needs, rather than subordinating that to and incorporating it in the overall revolutionary struggle with warfare as its main form. Here it can be readily grasped that the two positions in conflict represent precisely reform versus revolution.

Returning to the question of the party, it is the case that here, probably even more so than on the question of the state, Lenin had to not only uphold the essence and spirit of Marxism against opportunist distortions of them, nor even merely to develop Marxism, but to rupture with established tradition in the Marxist movement. For example, in the *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels state that, “The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties,”<sup>100</sup> and the fact that in the Russian Revolution the communists (the Bolsheviks) obviously did not apply this is often cited as evidence of their departure from Marxism. But, first of all, the *Communist Manifesto* adds on the next page that “The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.”<sup>101</sup> In the experience of the Russian Revolution — and indeed of the revolutionary struggle in general — it has been more than amply demonstrated that all other parties except the communists (whether based among the proletariat or not) do not have this as their aim (immediate or otherwise) and further that not all those who call themselves communists actually uphold this either. Thus the formation in Russia of a party, separate from and opposed to all other parties calling themselves proletarian — on the basis that they had demonstrated in practice that they were not proletarian in their ideology and in the content of their program and the class interests they served — was profoundly in the spirit of not only the *Communist Manifesto* but all of Marxism, though it might be possible to argue, by the method of biblical quotation, that the Bolsheviks violated some canon or commandment of official Marxism.

<sup>100</sup> Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 49.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

It is, however, not so much that Leninism led to the formation of a separate party opposed to other "proletarian" parties but the closely related fact that the Leninist party strives as its very reason for being to act as a highly organized vanguard detachment of the proletariat — it is this that has historically been at the heart of the attack on the Leninist party, beginning with Lenin and the Bolsheviks themselves. In some cases the experience of the Paris Commune is held up to oppose the Russian Revolution and Lenin's leadership in it, specifically on the basis that there was no such vanguard party in the Commune — none in the sense of what the Bolsheviks became in the course of the Russian Revolution. But this was precisely a great weakness of the Commune! It is true that Marx and Engels did not sum up from the Commune and its defeat that there was a need for a party of the Leninist type — had they done so it would simply be called a Marxist party with no need to identify it specifically with Lenin, and Lenin would have been spared some, but only some, of the abuse he received for making a crucial breakthrough on this front. But Marx and Engels were certainly aware that the Commune was greatly weakened because of the fact that leadership was in the hands of people and forces opposed to *scientific socialism* (communism). Beyond that, they were well aware that the (First) International, in which they were leading figures, was by no means fully communist (see for example "Marx to F. Bolte" (November 23, 1871), "Engels to A. Bebel" (June 20, 1873), and "Engels to F.A. Sorge" (September 12-17, 1874), in Marx and Engels, *Selected Letters*).

It might be argued that nevertheless the Second International, and in particular its most influential component, the German Social-Democratic Party, were not the type of organization that Lenin developed in Russia and that there is nothing to indicate that Engels, who exerted a significant influence in the German party and the Second International, thought they should have been that type of organization. And indeed, in itself, that is true. In part at least Engels' failure to grasp the fact that the German Social-Democratic Party was rotting at its foundation at the very time of achieving great successes in attracting a

mass following may account for the fact that he did not sum up that such a party and its organizational principles could not be a model for a party actually seeking to lead a proletarian revolution. However, it must be noted that even Lenin himself (in *What Is To Be Done?* as well as elsewhere) qualified his arguments for a centralized party by making reference to the lack of political freedom in Russia under the Tsarist autocracy and pointed to the German Social-Democratic Party as a model where conditions permitted such a party. In this regard, the pamphlet *Charting the Uncharted Course*, a reprinted section of the report from the 1980 Central Committee meeting of our party, sheds some important light:

By reading Lenin, one can get some idea of the prestige of the "German experience," which seems particularly characterized by massive influence in the (big) working class, even during relatively peaceful times. Even Lenin often felt he had to "tip his hat" to the prestige of the German party. For example *What Is To Be Done?* is full of qualifiers about how the Bolsheviks had to do things different from the Germans because of their particular circumstances. Most of Lenin's principles, we can see now, were correct in Germany as well as Russia.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>102</sup> *Charting the Uncharted Course* (Chicago: RCP Publications, 1980), p. 4. As noted earlier, Lenin summed up that the German Social-Democratic Party turned out to be much more moderate and opportunist than it had appeared to be. Still, Lenin wrote in *"Left-Wing" Communism* that history had confirmed that "revolutionary German Social-Democracy... came closest to being the party which the revolutionary proletariat required in order to attain victory" because, "Of all the Western parties, German revolutionary Social-Democracy produced the best leaders, and recovered, recuperated, and gained new strength more rapidly than the others." (Lenin, Chap. 4: "In the Struggle Against What Enemies Within the Working-Class Movement Did Bolshevism Grow Up and Become Strong and Steeled?," p. 19, emphasis in original.) Note that Lenin refers here to (and even puts in italics) *revolutionary* German Social-Democracy, which split off from and formed a pole in opposition to the opportunist wing that remained in the Second International. But it must also be said that, perhaps in significant part because of his understanding of the importance of a revolution in Germany, Lenin cherished not only hopes but certain illusions as well concerning this revolutionary Social-Democracy in Germany, underestimating perhaps the degree to which the infection of the opportunism of the "parent" party continued to weaken the revolutionary offspring.

Again, Lenin forged and applied these principles by leaping beyond what had previously been worked out by Marx or Engels and further by rupturing with conventional wisdom and practice in the Marxist movement, but he did so from the foundation of basic Marxist principle, by adhering to its basic methodology and entirely consistent with its revolutionary, critical spirit. To raise in opposition to these principles the experience of the Paris Commune, which was defeated — in part, if only secondarily, because of the lack of a Leninist-type party — or the Second International, which degenerated into an outright instrument of imperialism, is thinking turned inside-out and facing backwards, to put it mildly. To argue that the degeneration of the Russian Revolution can be traced to the very nature and role of the Leninist party itself is first of all contrary to the facts and an evasion of the fundamental problems besides. Lenin's argument in *What Is To Be Done?* — that the more highly organized and centralized the party was, the more it was a real vanguard organization of revolutionaries, the greater would be the role and initiative of the masses in revolutionary struggle — was powerfully demonstrated in the Russian Revolution itself and has been in all proletarian revolutions. Nowhere has such a revolution been made without such a party and nowhere has the lack of such a party contributed to unleashing the initiative of masses of the oppressed in *conscious revolutionary struggle*. And, as I pointed out in the pamphlet *If There Is To Be A Revolution, There Must Be A Revolutionary Party*, to argue that a vanguard, Leninist party may degenerate, may turn into an oppressive apparatus over the masses, and therefore it is better not to have such a party, only amounts to arguing that there should be no revolution in the first place; this will not eliminate the contradictions that make such a party necessary, the material and ideological conditions that must be transformed, with the leadership of such a party, in order to abolish class distinctions and therewith, finally, the need for a vanguard party.

Another decisive area in which Lenin went up against the established conventions and models of the Marxist movement, and in particular the German Social-Democratic Party and its

leading lights such as Kautsky, was in his analysis of imperialism. One of the key and most controversial aspects of this was Lenin's explanation of how the development of capitalism into its imperialist stage in a handful of advanced countries and the great extension and intensification of international exploitation and robbery by these imperialists, particularly in the colonies, led to a profound split in the working class between the masses of proletarians and what Lenin labeled an aristocracy of labor, a section of the workers bought off by the imperialists, bribed from the spoils of this international robbery. On this economic basis, Lenin noted,

the political institutions of modern capitalism — press, parliament, associations, congresses, etc. — have created *political* privileges and sops for the respectful, meek, reformist and patriotic office employees and workers, corresponding to the economic privileges and sops. Lucrative and soft jobs in the government or on the war industries committees, in parliament and on diverse committees, on the editorial staffs of "respectable," legally published newspapers or on the management councils of no less respectable and "bourgeois law-abiding" trade unions — this is the bait by which the imperialist bourgeoisie attracts and rewards the representatives and supporters of the "bourgeois labor parties."

The mechanics of political democracy works in the same direction.<sup>103</sup>

Of all this the German Social-Democratic Party and its leaders were indeed models! They refused to recognize this objective and profound split in the working class and bitterly attacked Lenin for emphasizing its existence and importance exactly because they had become representatives of the bourgeoisified section of the workers, in opposition to the masses of proletarians not only in Germany but internationally as well. "One of the most common sophistries of Kautskyism is its reference to the 'masses,' " Lenin wrote, continuing,

We do not want, they say, to break away from the masses and

<sup>103</sup> Lenin, *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*, CW, Vol. 23, p. 117.

mass organizations! But just think how Engels put the question. In the nineteenth century the "mass organizations" of the English trade unions were on the side of the bourgeois labor party. Marx and Engels did not reconcile themselves to it on this ground; they exposed it.<sup>104</sup>

Here, again, Lenin fought on the one hand to re-establish what Marx and Engels taught on a decisive question such as this, and he made extensive reference to their remarks on the bourgeoisification within the working class of England during the latter part of the nineteenth century when England enjoyed not only an industrial but a colonial monopoly relative to other countries. But on the other hand he had to wage a fierce battle to establish that this bourgeoisification, and more particularly the existence and role of a more or less permanently bribed labor aristocracy opposed to the proletarian masses and proletarian revolution, was an objective fact and central question in all the imperialist countries — Germany hardly being an exception! Lenin even insisted that this split in the working class constituted "the *pivot* of the tactics in the labor movement . . . dictated by the objective conditions of the imperialist era."<sup>105</sup> And his conclusion, drawn during the midst of World War 1, when these contradictions were reaching heightened and concentrated expression, is worth quoting at length:

Neither we nor anyone else can calculate precisely what portion of the proletariat is following and will follow the social-chauvinists and opportunists. This will be revealed only by the struggle, it will be definitely decided only by the socialist revolution. But we know for certain that the "defenders of the fatherland" in the imperialist war *represent* only a minority. And it is therefore our duty, if we wish to remain socialists, to go down *lower* and *deeper*, to the real masses; this is the whole meaning and the whole purport of the struggle against opportunism. By exposing the fact that the opportunists and social-chauvinists are in reality betraying and selling the interests of the masses, that they are defending the temporary privileges of

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 113, emphasis in original.

a minority of the workers, that they are the vehicles of bourgeois ideas and influences, that they are really allies and agents of the bourgeoisie, we teach the masses to appreciate their true political interests, to fight for socialism and for the revolution through all the long and painful vicissitudes of imperialist wars and imperialist armistices.

The only Marxist line in the world labor movement is to explain to the masses the inevitability and necessity of breaking with opportunism, to educate them for revolution by waging a relentless struggle against opportunism, to utilize the experiences of the war to expose, not conceal, the utter vileness of national-liberal labor politics.<sup>106</sup>

As indicated, this strategic orientation was founded on a scientific analysis of literally epochal changes in the material world, in particular the development of capitalism into imperialism, its highest and final stage. "If it were necessary to give the briefest possible definition of imperialism," Lenin wrote, "we should have to say that imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism."<sup>107</sup> But Lenin went on immediately to explain that such a definition was not adequate since it left out a number of basic features of imperialism. A more all-around definition, incorporating those features, he summarized, would be:

Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital [based upon the merger of bank capital with industrial capital — B.A.] is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.<sup>108</sup>

Even more fundamentally, however, Lenin showed that imperialism is capitalism at a stage where it has assumed these

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., pp. 119-120, emphasis in original.

<sup>107</sup> Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Chap. 7: "Imperialism, As a Special Stage of Capitalism," CW, Vol. 22, p. 266.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., pp. 266-267. It is a distinguishing feature of the Soviet-bloc revisionists that they reduce the economic essence of imperialism to monopolies, or

basic features but remains grounded in commodity production and its inherent laws and dynamics, above all the driving force of anarchy. In a masterful application of materialism and dialectics to the question, Lenin explains that

capitalism only became capitalist imperialism at a definite and very high stage of its development when certain of its fundamental characteristics began to change into their opposites, when the features of the epoch of transition from capitalism to a higher social and economic system had taken shape and revealed themselves in all spheres. Economically, the main thing in this process is the displacement of capitalist free competition by capitalist monopoly. Free competition is the basic feature of capitalism, and of commodity production generally; monopoly is the exact opposite of free competition, but we have seen the latter being transformed into monopoly before our eyes. . . . At the same time the monopolies, which have grown out of free competition, do not eliminate the latter, but exist above it and alongside it, and thereby give rise to a number of very acute, intense antagonisms, frictions and conflicts.<sup>109</sup>

Ignoring or failing to grasp the basic point here can only be part and parcel of a metaphysical and idealist approach to an analysis of imperialism and of seeing imperialism as a less anarchic form of capitalism than free competition, or as capitalism in a stage of gradual straight-line decline, lacking in any real dynamism, or perhaps some combination of both. As a very important aspect of this it will lead to the inability to grasp why, as Lenin insisted, there can be no permanent peaceful "organization" (that is, organized division) of the world among the imperialists and why agreements between imperialists can only be temporary truces

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metaphysically separate this one feature from its other basic features. This goes along with their use of the concept of state-monopoly capitalism in an unscientific way and in application to countries that are not *state-monopoly* capitalist — that is, the capitalist countries not included in the Soviet bloc (while ironically state-monopoly capital does exist in the Soviet bloc itself). This and related distortions by the Soviet revisionists will be returned to later.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., pp. 265-266.

between wars — figuratively and, more than that, quite literally.

It is certainly no accident that much of *Imperialism*, along with many other major works by Lenin in the same period (World War 1 in particular), was in large part a polemic against Kautsky, for in his analysis of imperialism as on other decisive questions "the only objective, i.e., real, social significance of Kautsky's 'theory' is this: it is a most reactionary method of consoling the masses with hopes of permanent peace being possible under capitalism."<sup>110</sup> Lenin pointed out that Kautsky separated the politics of imperialism from its economics, treating the conflicts among imperialists merely as a matter of policy — and not something rooted in both capitalist commodity production and its basic contradiction and in the features of imperialism as a special stage of capitalism. He tried to concoct a vision of "ultra-imperialism" in which the imperialists would be able to peacefully divide the world among themselves for an indefinite period. And he declared all this in the midst of the first world war in which the contradictions of imperialism literally exploded on a world scale, causing massive destruction as the imperialists far from peacefully sought a redivision of the world among themselves, rending capitalist society and opening up unprecedented revolutionary possibilities!

But "ultra-imperialism" was not Kautsky's only major distortion on the question of imperialism. He also defined imperialism as "a product of highly developed industrial capitalism. It consists in the striving of every industrial capitalist nation to bring under its control or to annex all large areas of *agrarian* territory, irrespective of what nations inhabit it."<sup>111</sup> This definition is wrong, first of all, because it makes an important feature of imperialism, the domination of the colonial and backward countries by the advanced capitalist states, the *essential* feature, which it is not, and because it puts industrial capital rather than finance capital in the forefront. More fundamentally it is part of

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>111</sup> Kautsky, cited in Lenin, *ibid.*, p. 268, emphasis Kautsky's.

Kautsky's overall failure to base himself on the underlying contradictions of capitalist commodity production and their actual expression in the imperialist stage, as summarized by Lenin; it is in unity with Kautsky's "ultra-imperialism," a vision of the advanced countries overcoming the contradictions and antagonisms among themselves and more or less unmolestedly continuing the domination of the backward regions of the world.

"Opportunism," Lenin wrote in another very important work,

means sacrificing the fundamental interests of the masses to the temporary interests of an insignificant minority of the workers or, in other words, an alliance between a section of the workers and the bourgeoisie, directed against the mass of the proletariat. The war has made such an alliance particularly conspicuous and inescapable. Opportunism was engendered in the course of decades by the special features in the period of the development of capitalism [the last several decades of the nineteenth century — B.A.], when the comparatively peaceful and cultured life of a stratum of privileged workingmen "bourgeoisified" them, gave them crumbs from the table of their national capitalisms, and isolated them from the suffering, misery and revolutionary temper of the impoverished and ruined masses. The imperialist war is the direct continuation and culmination of this state of affairs, because this is a war for the *privileges* of the Great-Power nations, for the repartition of colonies and domination over other nations.<sup>112</sup>

Lenin then spoke to another extremely telling feature of this opportunism:

the force of habit, the routine of relatively "peaceful" evolution, national prejudices, a fear of sharp turns and a disbelief in them. . . .<sup>113</sup>

Concentrated there is the fundamental opposition of this opportunism's world outlook to that of the revolutionary proletariat.

<sup>112</sup> Lenin, *The Collapse of the Second International*, Chap. 7, CW, Vol. 21, pp. 242-243, emphasis in original.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

And when the war broke out, shattering this routine, repeatedly impelling sharp turns, the responses of the two camps within the working class were also directly opposite: the opportunists gave full, magnified expression to their national prejudices, seeking to "defend and strengthen their privileged position as a petty-bourgeois 'upper stratum' or aristocracy (and bureaucracy) of the working class" while the revolutionary socialists (communists) made every effort to take advantage of the crisis, of every sharp turn, especially of the setbacks suffered in the war by their "own" imperialists, preparing for the opportunity to lead the masses in breaking through and overthrowing the capitalist order.<sup>114</sup>

In all of this it was once again the case that Lenin had to both defend and further develop Marxism, in its application to new problems and new crises. In his essay "Karl Marx," written at the very start of World War 1, Lenin stressed the importance of historic conjunctures, when as Lenin insisted, quoting Marx, "'days may come in which twenty years are embodied,'" as compared to periods marked by the slow and relatively peaceful accumulations of contradictions when twenty years do not count more than a day.<sup>115</sup> Lenin goes on to argue that:

At each stage of development, at each moment, the tactics of the proletariat must take account of this objectively inevitable dialectics of human history, on the one hand utilizing the periods of political stagnation or of sluggish, so-called "peaceful" development in order to develop the class consciousness, strength and fighting capacity of the advanced class, and, on the other hand, conducting all this work of utilization towards the "final aim" of this class and towards the creation in it of the ability to accomplish the practical solution of great tasks in the great days in which "twenty years are embodied."<sup>116</sup>

Lenin continued to place great emphasis on this point in his

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>115</sup> Marx, cited in Lenin, *Marx Engels Marxism*, p. 38.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

polemics against the opportunists (and in his writing generally) throughout the war and in its immediate aftermath, repeatedly recalling that Marx had himself emphasized this same point. We have seen, however, that the opportunists of the Second International, and of the German Social-Democratic Party in particular, had thrown out this basic revolutionary orientation and replaced it with a reformist, gradualist, evolutionary one. This was closely linked with the question of "defense of the fatherland" in the war. And here Lenin was especially confronted with the necessity to uphold and apply the spirit of Marxism against the letter of Marxism. To cover their treachery, the "socialist" defenders of the fatherland quoted extensively from Marx's and Engels' statements on various wars where they sided with one bourgeoisie or another. In answering this Lenin showed that in these wars the question of proletarian revolution was not yet on the historical agenda and that what was at stake was national liberation or opposition to feudalism, reactionary monarchies, etc. Thus, Lenin concluded, the only question in these circumstances was: the victory of which bourgeoisie, the defeat of which reactionary interests, is preferable. Having summed this up Lenin sharply contrasted it with the present imperialist era and the imperialist world war, emphatically stating that:

Whoever refers today to Marx's attitude towards the wars of the epoch of the *progressive* bourgeoisie and forgets Marx's statement that "the workers have no fatherland," a statement that applies *precisely* to the epoch of the reactionary, obsolete bourgeoisie, to the epoch of the socialist revolution, shamelessly distorts Marx and substitutes the bourgeois for the socialist point of view.<sup>117</sup>

Applying the basic principles and methodology of Marxism, in opposition to opportunist distortion and misuse of statements

<sup>117</sup> Lenin, *Socialism and War*, Chap. 1: "The Principles of Socialism and the War of 1914-1915, False References to Marx and Engels," in *Lenin on War and Peace, Three Articles* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), p. 17, emphasis in original.

by Marx and Engels, Lenin never let up on the point that the decisive question in the war was not "who started it" (who "fired the first shot") or what the particular form of government was in this or that belligerent country, etc. — all ruses raised by the social-chauvinists as well as undisguised chauvinists. The decisive question, for a Marxist, is what are the class interests involved and of what economics and politics is the war a continuation?

"For the philistine the important thing is *where* the armies stand, who is winning *at the moment*," Lenin also noted. But,

For the Marxist the important thing is *what issues* are at stake in *this* war, during which first one, then the other army may be on top.

What is the present war being fought over? The answer is given in our resolution (based on the policy the belligerent powers pursued for decades prior to the war). England, France and Russia are fighting to keep the colonies they have seized, to be able to rob Turkey, etc. Germany is fighting to take over these colonies and to be able herself to rob Turkey, etc. Let us suppose even that the Germans take Paris or St. Petersburg. Would that change the nature of the present war? Not at all. The Germans' purpose — and more important, the policy that would bring it to realization if they were to win — is to seize the colonies, establish domination over Turkey, annex areas populated by other nations, for instance, Poland, etc. It is definitely not to bring the French or the Russians under foreign domination. The real nature of the present war is not national but imperialist. In other words, it is not being fought to enable one side to overthrow national oppression, which the other side is trying to maintain. It is a war between two groups of oppressors, between two freebooters over the division of their booty, over who shall rob Turkey and the colonies.<sup>118</sup>

The social-chauvinists, who insisted on defending their imperialist fatherlands in this imperialist war, had turned things upside down, for they opposed the right of self-determination (and defense of the fatherland) in the colonies — or at least the

<sup>118</sup> Lenin, "A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism," *CW*, Vol. 23, pp. 33-34, emphasis in original.



colonies of their own imperialism — while insisting on the right to defend the imperialist fatherland in its pursuit of oppressing and robbing the colonies — just the reverse of the correct stand!

As noted, this was closely related to the reformist, evolutionary orientation and strategy of these opportunists. And here the question of certain mistakes made by Engels arises again. In *Conquer the World* I suggested that some of the positions taken by Marx and Engels — and particularly the latter — may have represented the continuation of the approach of determining which bourgeoisie's victory was preferable beyond the stage where this was still applicable. More specifically, according to a pamphlet published by the Chinese revisionists, Engels took the stand, in the early 1890s, that Tsarist Russia then constituted the main enemy in Europe and with regard to Russia,

Should the danger of war become greater, we can tell the government that we are ready, given a square deal making it possible for us to do so, to support it against the foreign foe, on the assumption that the government employs all means, including revolutionary means, to wage the war relentlessly. . . . It would be a question of national existence, and for us it would also be a question of maintaining the position and the prospective opportunities we have gained.<sup>119</sup>

I have been unable to find the specific works by Engels cited by the Chinese revisionists, but it seems that these are accurate quotations, judging by the fact that Lenin, in his polemics against the social-chauvinists, refers to such a stand being taken by Engels in 1891.<sup>120</sup> Here, in my opinion, it is possible to see how Engels, while he opposed the outright opportunism of the leadership of the German Social-Democratic Party, had been somewhat seduced by their apparent successes and had made errors in the same direction. With Engels, however, this was precisely a question of errors — recall his insistence that he was

<sup>119</sup> Engels, cited in *Chairman Mao's Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds is a Major Contribution to Marxism-Leninism* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977), p. 60.

<sup>120</sup> See for example, Lenin, *Socialism and War*, p. 16.

advocating certain policies as tactics for Germany only and only for a particular time, that these tactics might not be applicable tomorrow and that he was in no way advocating peaceful transition to socialism as a principle. For the Kautskys and other leaders of the Second International, it was not merely a question of mistakes but of a whole strategic orientation and a world outlook that had come to expect and rely upon the absence of sudden and drastic change, banking on the peaceful replacement of open imperialism by "socialist" imperialism. The revolutionary, internationalist position was developed and carried forward precisely in direct and fierce confrontation with this rotting chauvinist "socialism" and through the orientation of recognizing and preparing for the inevitable shattering of the "normal," "peaceful" times and the prospect of rupturing with the old and making great leaps forward.

Had the leaders of the revolutionary (communist) wing of socialism, and Lenin above all, not firmly and consistently applied this latter (dialectical materialist) outlook, there would have been no proletarian revolution in Russia — in fact there would not have been the recognition that this revolution was possible. The ripening of the revolutionary situation and the possibility of seizing power through the Soviets in a number of key industrial centers first and then winning over the peasantry in the countryside, establishing the proletarian dictatorship and passing on to the socialist stage of the revolution (which up until then had remained within the confines of bourgeois-democratic revolution) — all this would not have been brought to light; conventional wisdom and established authority in the Marxist movement refused to see the emergence of conditions for a proletarian revolution and more generally ruled out the possibility of socialist revolution in a country like Russia where the proletariat constituted a small minority and where the productive forces and economic conditions generally were still quite backward on the whole.

Here, again, to break through this, Lenin had to not simply uphold but further develop Marxism, including in the realm of philosophy, materialist dialectics. It was during the first world

war that Lenin took up extensive restudy of this question, focusing especially on dialectics. In his 1915 article, "On the Question of Dialectics," Lenin begins with "The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts," commenting that "this aspect of dialectics . . . usually receives inadequate attention," and that this had been true even with Engels, who had written fairly extensively on dialectics.<sup>121</sup> Lenin goes on to contrast the metaphysical with the dialectical view of development:

In the first conception of motion, *self-movement*, its *driving force*, its source, its motive, remains in the shade (or this source is made *external* — God, subject, etc.). In the second conception the chief attention is directed precisely to knowledge of the *source of "self"-movement*.

The first conception is lifeless, pale and dry. The second is living. The second *alone* furnishes the key to the "self-movement" of everything existing; it alone furnishes the key to the "leaps," to the "break in continuity," to the "transformation into the opposite," to the destruction of the old and the emergence of the new.<sup>122</sup>

This had everything to do with Lenin's leadership in dealing with the earth-shaking changes brought on by the outbreak of, and further heightened during the course of, the war, and in particular in recognizing the possibility for and carrying through with the proletarian-socialist revolution in Russia, without the permission and indeed with the direct opposition of the lifeless, pale and dry moguls of "Marxism."

Stalin gave a summation of the struggle around this question in the Marxist movement in *The Foundations of Leninism*, where he wrote:

Where will the revolution begin? Where, in what country, can the front of capital be pierced first?

Where industry is more developed, where the proletariat constitutes the majority, where there is more culture, where

<sup>121</sup> Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 38, p. 359.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360, emphasis in original.

there is more democracy — that was the reply usually given formerly.

No, objects the Leninist theory of revolution, *not necessarily where industry is more developed*, and so forth. The front of capital will be pierced where the chain of imperialism is weakest, for the proletarian revolution is the result of the breaking of the chain of the world imperialist front at its weakest link; and it may turn out that the country which has started the revolution, which has made a breach in the front of capital, is less developed in a capitalist sense than other, more developed, countries, which have, however, remained within the framework of capitalism.

In 1917 the chain of the imperialist world front proved to be weaker in Russia than in the other countries. It was there that the chain broke and provided an outlet for the proletarian revolution.<sup>123</sup>

At the time of the October Revolution in Russia Lenin not only hoped but expected that it would be the prelude to and a signal for the proletarian revolution in the West, Germany especially. He made great efforts to assist and stimulate the development of the revolutionary movement there (and the rising revolutionary liberation movements in the East) despite the additional difficulties this involved for the fledgling Soviet Republic which was literally fighting for its life. But when the dust cleared and the Soviet Republic was left as the only proletarian state to emerge out of the revolutionary crises arising in connection with World War 1 and its outcome, when it became clear that the proletarian revolution would be delayed in the West and was only beginning to appear on the horizon in the East, Lenin summed this up and provided the basic orientation for consolidating the gains won in Russia and standing up against the rest of the world, for a period, as the sole socialist state. As early as 1915 Lenin had written:

Uneven economic and political development is an absolute

<sup>123</sup> Joseph Stalin, *The Foundations of Leninism*, Chap. 3: "Theory," in *Problems of Leninism* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976), pp. 27-28, emphasis in original.

law of capitalism. Hence, the victory of socialism is possible first in several or even in one capitalist country alone. After expropriating the capitalists and organizing their own socialist production, the victorious proletariat of that country will arise *against* the rest of the world — the capitalist world — attracting to its cause the oppressed classes of other countries, stirring uprisings in those countries against the capitalists, and in case of need using even armed force against the exploiting classes and their states.<sup>124</sup>

Eight years later (and only a year before his death), faced with exactly this kind of situation, Lenin insisted that:

Indeed, the power of the state over all large-scale means of production, political power in the hands of the proletariat, the alliance of this proletariat with the many millions of small and very small peasants, the assured proletarian leadership of the peasantry, etc. . . . Is this not all that is necessary to build a complete socialist society? It is still not the building of socialist society, but it is all that is necessary and sufficient for it.<sup>125</sup>

Thus, the possibility of socialism in one country, even a country like Russia whose economic conditions were backward at the time of the revolution, is the theoretical contribution of Lenin in opposition to the wooden pedants and doctrinaire defeatists and other opportunists who denied this possibility on the basis that the productive forces were too undeveloped. The actual building of socialism in the Soviet Union, an historic advance for the international proletariat, was achieved as a result of carrying through with the overall orientation provided by Lenin.

During the first years of the Soviet Republic (and the last years of his life), Lenin grappled with the profound theoretical and practical questions that were posed in actually handling the complex interrelationship between the transformation of Soviet

<sup>124</sup> Lenin, "On the Slogan for a United States of Europe," *CW*, Vol. 21, p. 342, emphasis in original.

<sup>125</sup> Lenin, "On Co-operation," *CW*, Vol. 33, p. 468.

society in the economic base and the superstructure, the defense of the Soviet Republic against actual or threatened imperialist military intervention (along with constant economic, political and diplomatic pressure), and the tasks of stirring up and supporting the revolts of the oppressed masses in the rest of the world. He already recognized the danger of the degeneration of the party and state and initiated various efforts to combat this, to draw the masses more broadly and thoroughly into the running of the state and to fight against bureaucratic tendencies and the influence of old and new bourgeois elements who had to be enlisted in the state apparatus or were actually worming their way in for counterrevolutionary purposes. He also summed up even then that the focus of the world revolutionary struggle was beginning to shift from West to East. In all these spheres Lenin gave profound insight and laid key cornerstones for the future development of the world proletarian revolution. But it was to be left for later — and for further experience, positive and negative, in socialist society and for new challenges in the revolutionary movement — for these to be not only built upon but raised to new heights.<sup>126</sup>

## 2. Mao Tsetung Thought: a continuation, a qualitative advance of Marxism-Leninism

In *Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions* I discussed Mao's application and development of Marxism-Leninism in the spheres of revolution in colonial countries; revolutionary war

<sup>126</sup> While to a significant degree and in a number of important aspects these questions will be returned to throughout the remainder of this essay, a thorough discussion of Lenin's treatment of them, of the experience of the Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership and finally of its reversion to capitalism beginning in the mid-1950s is not possible in this essay. For such a discussion the reader is directed to *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will, Revolution*, No. 50 (Chicago: RCP Publications, 1981); and the two volume set *The Soviet Union: Socialist or Social-Imperialist, Part 1: Essays Toward the Debate on the Nature of Soviet Society*, and *Part 2: The Question Is Joined—Raymond Lotta vs. Al Szymanski* (Chicago: RCP Publications, 1983), and other materials relating to this debate, initiated by our party.

and military line; political economy, economic policy and socialist construction; philosophy; culture and the superstructure; and, the greatest of Mao's many contributions, continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was in the conclusion of that book that I summed up the principle previously cited in this essay — that in order for revolution, especially the proletarian revolution, to succeed, those leading a particular revolution will have to not only uphold the basic principles and method of Marxism-Leninism but will also have to "depart from and even oppose certain particular conceptions or previous practices which have come to be invested with the stature of 'established norms' in the revolutionary movement." With *Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions* as a general reference and this essay so far as a specific foundation, I am going to focus here on two questions, two decisive areas in which Mao made pathbreaking advances in the theory and practice of revolution: revolution in colonial countries and continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

One of the main questions taken up by the Third (Communist) International after its founding in the wake of the October Revolution was the national and colonial question and the prospects for revolution in the East. In a report at the Second Congress of the Communist International Lenin summarized several important, if still somewhat tentative, theses on this question. Speaking of the experience so far in the new Soviet Republic and indicating broader implications for the revolutionary movement in the colonial and dependent countries, Lenin pointed out:

The Russian Communists' practical activities in the former tsarist colonies, in such backward countries as Turkestan, etc., have confronted us with the question of how to apply the communist tactics and policy in pre-capitalist conditions. The preponderance of pre-capitalist relations is still the main determining feature in these countries, so that there can be no question of a purely proletarian movement in them. There is practically no industrial proletariat in these countries. Nevertheless, we have assumed, we must assume, the role of leader even there. Experience has shown us that tremendous dif-

ficulties have to be surmounted in these countries. However, the practical results of our work have also shown that despite these difficulties we are in a position to inspire in the masses an urge for independent political thinking and independent political action, even where a proletariat is practically nonexistent.<sup>127</sup>

Lenin went on to conclude:

The idea of Soviet organization is a simple one, and is applicable not only to proletarian but also to peasant feudal and semi-feudal relations. Our experience in this respect is not as yet very considerable. However, the debate in the commission, in which several representatives from colonial countries participated, demonstrated convincingly that the Communist International's theses should point out that peasants' Soviets, Soviets of the exploited, are a weapon which can be employed, not only in capitalist countries but also in countries with pre-capitalist relations, and that it is the absolute duty of Communist parties and of elements prepared to form Communist parties everywhere to conduct propaganda in favor of peasants' Soviets or of working people's Soviets, this to include backward and colonial countries. Wherever conditions permit, they should at once make attempts to set up Soviets of working people.<sup>128</sup>

At the same time Lenin, while noting that the commission had adopted the formulation "national-revolutionary movement" to distinguish the revolutionary from reformist movements in the colonies, argued that "any national movement can only be a bourgeois-democratic movement, since the overwhelming mass of the population in the backward countries consists of peasants who represent bourgeois-capitalist relationships."<sup>129</sup> Thus,

we, as Communists, should and will support bourgeois-

<sup>127</sup> Lenin, "Report of the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions," (July 26, 1929), CW, Vol. 31, pp. 242-243.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p. 241.

liberation movements in the colonies only when they are genuinely revolutionary, and when their exponents do not hinder our work of educating and organizing in a revolutionary spirit the peasantry and the masses of the exploited. If these conditions do not exist, the Communists in these countries must combat the reformist bourgeoisie, to whom the heroes of the Second International also belong.<sup>130</sup>

Finally, as an overall summation, Lenin addressed the following fundamental question:

The question was posed as follows: are we to consider as correct the assertion that the capitalist stage of economic development is inevitable for backward nations now on the road to emancipation and among whom a certain advance towards progress is to be seen since the war? We replied in the negative. If the victorious revolutionary proletariat conducts systematic propaganda among them, and the Soviet governments come to their aid with all the means at their disposal — in that event it will be mistaken to assume that the backward peoples must inevitably go through the capitalist stage of development. Not only should we create independent contingents of fighters and party organizations in the colonies and the backward countries, not only at once launch propaganda for the organization of peasants' Soviets and strive to adapt them to the pre-capitalist conditions, but the Communist International should advance the proposition, with the appropriate theoretical grounding, that with the aid of the proletariat of the advanced countries, backward countries can go over to the Soviet system and, through certain stages of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist stage.<sup>131</sup>

Lenin added: "The necessary means for this cannot be indicated in advance. These will be prompted by practical experience."<sup>132</sup>

Stalin carried forward this basic analysis after Lenin and applied it to a number of different situations, most importantly to China, particularly in the period of 1924-27 which was marked

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p. 242.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, p. 244.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

by intense revolutionary struggle involving the alliance of the proletariat, the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie, under the overall umbrella of the Kuomintang organization. While some of Stalin's analysis and advice in this period involved certain mistakes, including a tendency to objectively subordinate the proletariat and the Communist Party to bourgeois forces in the Kuomintang and make them more vulnerable to the treachery of the outright reactionary elements among these forces, it remains true that Stalin helped to establish the correct overall orientation for the Chinese revolution and, as I wrote in *Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions*, Stalin

helped to analyze the specific features of the Chinese revolution: the fact that it was an anti-imperialist struggle; the fact that the feudal domination of the countryside and the feudal exploitation of the peasantry played a central role in the Chinese economy, and therefore that the agrarian revolution in China was at the heart of the struggle and closely linked with the anti-imperialist struggle of the Chinese nation; and that the proletariat could and must lead the bourgeois-democratic revolution and advance the movement through and beyond that stage to the stage of socialist revolution. Further, Stalin pointed out that from the beginning in China the armed revolution was fighting the armed counterrevolution and that this was both a specific feature and specific advantage in the Chinese revolution.<sup>133</sup>

Lenin and Stalin had thus indicated basic elements for revolutionary strategy in colonial and backward countries generally and in China in particular. But it was Mao Tsetung, in the course of leading the Chinese revolution over several decades, who concretized and developed this strategy. And he did this by drawing from these basic elements but also rejecting certain particulars and recasting those adopted, forging a synthesis on a higher level: the theory of new-democratic revolution. This theory showed how the agrarian revolution and the anti-imperialist struggle could be correctly combined under the

<sup>133</sup> Avakian, *Mao's Immortal*, p. 14.

leadership of the proletariat and the Communist Party, producing a revolutionary movement which on the one hand was, in its first stage, still resolving the contradictions characteristic of a bourgeois-democratic revolution but on the other hand was preparing the ground for, and upon victory in the first stage would pass over to, the second, socialist stage. The theory of new-democratic revolution and its concrete application in China through various phases of the struggle led to the correct handling of the relationship of alliance and struggle with the bourgeoisie (or sections of it), to the development of the independent armed forces of the revolutionary masses led by the Communist Party and of Communist-led liberated base areas, to maintaining the independence and initiative of the proletariat and the party in every sphere of the struggle, to the forging and maintaining of the crucial alliance between the workers and peasants through a series of shifts in the objective situation and in the necessary tasks of the revolution in the countryside (as well as overall). It led, finally, to the defeat of imperialism and feudalism in China, to the founding of the People's Republic of China and the embarking of China on the socialist road. This, as Mao observed, changed the face of China and the East — and indeed the entire world. While, of course, there were particularities to the revolution in China — especially the whole phase of the anti-Japanese war and other factors which in an overall sense favored the formation, defense and development of the revolutionary armed forces and revolutionary regimes (liberated base areas) under the leadership of the Communist Party and the success of the strategy of surrounding the city from the countryside — the theory and strategic orientation of the new-democratic revolution indicated for the first time and continues to indicate in basic terms the "necessary means" for how colonial and backward countries can advance to socialism without having to pass through the capitalist stage.

Mao Tsetung similarly made and led genuinely historic breakthroughs on the question of the transition through socialism to communist society. In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, written after the experience of the Paris Commune as

well as the revolutions of the mid-19th century, Marx made the following summation:

Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the *revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*.<sup>134</sup>

While this provided a general orientation it did not (and indeed could not) anticipate many concrete, and complex, problems that have already arisen in the process of that transition up to this point. It would seem that when Marx referred to the transition to *communist* society he meant the lower phase of communist society and that he envisioned this as a society where there is no longer any private ownership of the means of production, and no longer either commodity production or wage-labor as such, although payment would be according to work and be received as certificates indicating the amount of labor performed, so that in this sense the principle governing commodity exchange would still be in effect. In *The State and Revolution*, written just before the October Revolution in Russia, Lenin argued that during the transition period there would still be the need to suppress the overthrown exploiters but that once the first stage of communist society had been reached (which is "usually called socialism," Lenin said) there will no longer be any class left which must be suppressed; "differences, and unjust differences, in wealth will still persist, but the *exploitation* of man by man will have become impossible because it will be impossible to seize the *means of production* — the factories, machines, land, etc. — and make them private property."<sup>135</sup> The need for a state will nonetheless remain, he said, although its nature and function will be different than in the transition to this first,

<sup>134</sup> Marx, pp. 27-28; emphasis in original.

<sup>135</sup> Lenin, Chap. 5: "The Economic Basis of the Withering Away of the State," *CW*, Vol. 25, pp. 472, 471, emphasis in original.

socialist stage of communism. Once this stage is reached

there are no other rules than those of "bourgeois law." To this extent, therefore, there still remains the need for a state, which, while safeguarding the common ownership of the means of production, would safeguard equality in labor and in the distribution of products. . . .

The state will be able to wither away completely when society adopts the rule: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs," i.e., when people have become so accustomed to observing the fundamental rules of social intercourse and when their labor has become so productive that they will voluntarily work *according to their ability*. "The narrow horizon of bourgeois law," which compels one to calculate with the heartlessness of a Shylock whether one has not worked half an hour more than somebody else, whether one is not getting less pay than somebody else — this narrow horizon will then be left behind. There will then be no need for society, in distributing the products, to regulate the quantity to be received by each; each will take freely "according to his needs" . . . .

In its first phase, or first stage, communism *cannot* as yet be fully mature economically and entirely free from traditions or vestiges of capitalism. Hence the interesting phenomenon that communism in its first phase retains "the narrow horizon of bourgeois law." Of course, bourgeois law in regard to the distribution of *consumer* goods inevitably presupposes the existence of the *bourgeois state*, for law is nothing without an apparatus capable of *enforcing* the observance of the rules of law.

It follows that under communism there remains for a time not only bourgeois law, but even the bourgeois state, without the bourgeoisie!

This may sound like a paradox or simply a dialectical conundrum, of which Marxism is often accused by people who have not taken the slightest trouble to study its extraordinarily profound content.

But in fact, remnants of the old, surviving in the new, confront us in life at every step, both in nature and in society. And Marx did not arbitrarily insert a scrap of "bourgeois" law into communism, but indicated what is economically and politically inevitable in a society emerging out of the womb of capitalism.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., pp. 472,474,476, emphasis in original. The phrase "bourgeois law" is often translated as "bourgeois right."

I have quoted Lenin at length here because this sets forth what remained his general analysis of and approach to this question after the dictatorship of the proletariat was first established in Russia up to the time of his death seven years later. During that period, Lenin paid great attention to this basic question and called specific attention to the constant engendering of the bourgeoisie and capitalism in the soil left over from the old society — and in this he focused on the existence and influence of small-scale production — to the emergence of new bourgeois elements among the Soviet government employees, along with the presence there of many intellectuals who were trained not only technically but ideologically in the old society, to the strength and connections of the overthrown exploiters, to the role of international capital and its connection with counter-revolutionary elements in the new Soviet society, to the heavy weight of tradition and the force of habit and other factors which continued to pose very powerfully the danger of capitalist restoration. But Lenin was not able to give a clear picture of how these problems would be concretely interrelated with the achievement of the first, socialist phase of communism as he had discussed it in *The State and Revolution*; this phase was far from being realized when Lenin died.

As a matter of fact, in no socialist country that has existed, neither in the Soviet Union nor China nor elsewhere, has a society like that discussed in *The State and Revolution* (and described by Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*) actually existed. Under the leadership of Stalin, ownership in the Soviet Union was radically transformed in the late 1920s and early 1930s in industry and agriculture, but neither then nor later did this ever reach the point where all ownership of the means of production had become state ownership, as assumed by Marx and Lenin in discussing the lower stage of communism. Nor was commodity production and exchange or wage-labor ever eliminated. The same is true for all the countries which were at one time socialist. Stalin's approach to this question was to conclude that once small-scale production had been (overwhelmingly) eliminated and ownership almost entirely transformed into

state or collective ownership (the latter by the peasants in agricultural production in particular) socialism had been achieved, antagonistic classes had been eliminated, the need to suppress internal class enemies no longer existed and the socialist state was still required only because of danger posed by international capital and the infiltration of its agents.<sup>137</sup> This was, on the one hand, a muddled formulation, as has been pointed out in other publications by our party,<sup>138</sup> and on the other hand it was a departure from the analysis presented by Lenin who had said that even in socialist society as he defined it the state would still be necessary for the enforcement of "bourgeois law" in relation to distribution of consumer goods (and not merely because of imperialist encirclement and imperialist agents). Most seriously of all, Stalin was wrong in saying that antagonistic classes — and in particular the bourgeoisie — no longer existed in the Soviet Union. But it is important to grasp that Stalin's formulation was a response, however marred by error, to the fact that the transition from capitalist society to communist society, and in particular the phase of this transition after the basic elimination of private ownership has been carried out, has proved to be more protracted and complex than envisioned by Marx or Lenin.

On the basis of summing up the positive and negative experience of the Soviet Union, particularly the causes of the rise to power of revisionism and the restoration of capitalism there, as well as the experience of the class struggle in China itself, Mao Tsetung formulated the following analysis in 1962:

Socialist society covers a considerably long historical period. In the historical period of socialism, there are still classes, class contradictions and class struggle, there is the struggle between

<sup>137</sup> See for example Stalin's *Report To The Eighteenth Congress Of The C.P.S.U.(B.) On The Work Of The Central Committee*, (March 10, 1939), Part 3: "Further Strengthening of the C.P.S.U.(B)," Section 4: "Some Questions of Theory," in *Problems of Leninism*.

<sup>138</sup> See "Beat Back the Dogmato-Revisionist Attack on Mao Tsetung Thought," J. Werner, *The Communist*, Number 5 (Chicago: RCP Publications, May, 1979) and *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will*.

the socialist road and the capitalist road, and there is the danger of capitalist restoration.<sup>139</sup>

A few years later, when the class struggle in socialist China had further intensified, approaching the point of erupting into open antagonistic conflict throughout society, Mao made a deeper analysis of how a new bourgeoisie is continuously engendered out of the very contradictions of socialist society itself — the fact that ownership, while generally socialist, consists of collective ownership by groups of working people (peasants in particular) as well as state ownership; that commodity production and relations continue to persist and the law of value with them, though this is restricted and not the determining principle in the economy; that the social division of labor as well as the distribution of income continues to contain significant inequalities; that the differences between town and country, workers and peasants and mental and manual laborers continue to exist, as do inequalities between men and women, nationalities and so on; and along with all this that the superstructure continues to reflect these contradictions as well as the influence of the bourgeoisie and the old society generally and is a crucial arena of struggle between the old and the new, and their respective upholders, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This represented a further development of Marxism-Leninism in the sphere of political economy and was closely linked to and in large part the result of Mao's enrichment of Marxist-Leninist philosophy — particularly in systematizing the understanding of the law of contradiction (unity of opposites) as the fundamental law of materialist dialectics — and its application to socialist society. In the same way Mao

made the unprecedented analysis that, in the conditions where ownership is (in the main) socialized and where the party is both the leading political center of the socialist state and the

<sup>139</sup> Quoted in "Ninth Party Congress Report," *The Ninth National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Documents)* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1969), p. 22.



main directing force of the economy — in which the state is the decisive sector — the contradiction between the party as the leading force and the working class and the masses under its leadership is a concentrated expression of the contradictions characterizing socialist society as a transition from the old society to fully communist, classless society. Therefore, Mao concluded, while the party must on the one hand continue to play its vanguard role, on the other hand the party itself, especially at its top levels, is also where the new bourgeoisie will assume its most concentrated expression, where its core and leading forces will be centered, among those who, as Mao described it, "take the capitalist road." To defeat the attempts of these forces, and the reactionary social base they mobilize, to seize power from the proletariat and restore capitalism it is necessary, Mao summed up, to expose and wage struggle against the revisionist line and actions of these "capitalist roaders" and more than that to continually revolutionize the party itself as part of revolutionizing society as a whole by unleashing and developing the conscious activism of the masses and mobilizing them in ideological and political struggle in every sphere of society while directing the spearhead of that struggle against the revisionists in positions of authority.<sup>140</sup>

It was this, and more, that burst forth in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China beginning in the mid-'60s. Adjectives such as "unprecedented," "historic," "earth-shaking" and so on have frequently been used to describe this mass revolutionary movement, and if anything they understate its impact and importance. With the reversal of the revolution in China in 1976 and the suppression of everything revolutionary there in the years since, and in the present world situation, there is a strong tendency to forget what it meant that there was a country, with one-quarter of the world's population, where there had not only been a successful revolution leading to socialism, overcoming tremendous obstacles and powerful reactionary forces in the process, but even after that there was again

<sup>140</sup> *Basic Principles For The Unity Of Marxist-Leninists And For The Line Of The International Communist Movement*, paragraph 126.

a mass revolutionary upheaval, initiated and inspired by the leading figure in the new socialist state, Mao Tsetung, against those in authority who sought to become the new party of order, restoring capitalism in the name of "socialism," using their revolutionary credentials as capital. The Cultural Revolution involved literally hundreds of millions of people in various forms and various levels of political struggle and ideological debate over the direction of society and affairs of state, the problems of the world revolutionary struggle and the international communist movement. Barriers were broken down to areas formerly forbidden to the masses of people — science, philosophy, education, literature and art. Putting self above the interests of the revolution, in China and the world, was an outlook under attack and on the defensive and few were those who would openly utter such phrases as "my career." Through all this, transformations were brought about in the major institutions in society and in the thinking of masses of people, further revolutionizing them. Through all this as well, new breakthroughs were made and new lessons gained in moving, through the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat itself, toward the eventual withering away of the state — striking at the soil engendering class distinctions and at the same time drawing the masses more broadly and more consciously into the running of society. And though the Cultural Revolution did not ultimately succeed in preventing the seizure of power by the "capitalist-roaders" — and Mao repeatedly insisted that one such Cultural Revolution alone could not provide a guarantee against the triumph of revisionism and capitalist restoration — it nevertheless "succeeded for ten years in blocking capitalist restoration, training revolutionary successors who are fighting today against the new capitalist rulers in China, and helped to spread Marxism-Leninism throughout the world."<sup>141</sup>

<sup>141</sup> From the Joint Communiqué "To The Marxist-Leninists, The Workers, And The Oppressed Of All Countries," signed by Ceylon Communist Party, Groupe Marxiste-Léniniste du Sénégal, Unión de Lucha Marxista-Leninista (Spain), Mao Tsetung-Kredsen (Denmark), Marxist-Leninist Collective (Britain),

The Cultural Revolution had a powerful internationalist content and exerted a tremendous influence on the revolutionary movement in all parts of the world. In 1968, at the height of the Cultural Revolution, Mao summed up:

We have already won great victory. But the defeated class will still struggle. These people are still around and this class still exists. Therefore, we cannot speak of final victory. Not even for decades. We must not lose our vigilance. According to the Leninist viewpoint, the final victory of a socialist country not only requires the efforts of the proletariat and the broad masses of the people at home, but also involves the victory of the world revolution and the abolition of the system of exploitation of man by man over the whole globe, upon which all mankind will be emancipated. Therefore, it is wrong to speak lightly of the final victory of the revolution in our country; it runs counter to Leninism and does not conform to facts.<sup>142</sup>

While criticism can be raised of this statement for approaching things a bit in terms of "from China out to the rest of the world," rather than taking the world arena as the starting point (and I have made such a criticism in "Outline of Views on the Historical Experience of the International Communist Movement and the Lessons for Today," *Revolution*, No. 49, June, 1981), the orientation of this statement and more generally of the theoretical guidance and practical struggle marking the Cultural Revolution was one of profound proletarian internationalism. Concrete assistance and support, on every level, was given to the crucial revolutionary movements in the world, especially the Vietnamese people's struggle against U.S. imperialism and other national liberation movements; and mass rallies and other

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New Zealand Red Flag Group, Nottingham Communist Group (Britain), Organizzazione Comunista Proletaria Marxista-Leninista (Italy), Partido Comunista Revolucionario de Chile, Pour l'Internationale Proletarienne (France), Reorganization Committee, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, Unión Comunista Revolucionaria (Dominican Republic).

<sup>142</sup> Quoted in *The Ninth National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Documents)*, pp. 64-65.

events, marked not by mere formalism but genuine revolutionary fervor and internationalist support, were repeatedly held in Peking and throughout China in support of the revolutionary struggles of the proletariat and oppressed masses in all parts of the world. If, to paraphrase Mao, the October Revolution in Russia spread the salvos of Marxism-Leninism to all parts of the world, then it is no less true that the Cultural Revolution in China spread the salvos of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought throughout the world.

Here, again, the theory of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the analysis on which it is based — the understanding that classes and class struggle, and most centrally the antagonistic contradiction and struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, will continue throughout the period of socialism, which itself has proven to be the transition from the old society to the higher stage of communism — all this was developed by Mao not only on the basis of defending and to a significant degree re-establishing what Lenin (and Marx before him) had taught on the transition from capitalism to communism but by making a synthesis on a higher level, including the departure from, even the discarding of, certain theses which experience had proved incorrect or inadequate. It is in this way that this theory and the practice under its guidance — concentrated in the Cultural Revolution and the torrent of political struggle and mass ideological debate it unleashed — carried the international proletariat and the international communist movement to the highest peak they have so far ascended.

These great contributions of Mao Tsetung and his overall qualitative advance of Marxism-Leninism are, again, closely related to important developments in the material world, society in particular. Obviously the theory of the new-democratic revolution was founded in the fact that the conditions in China and, more basically, its position in world relations made the soil especially fertile there for revolution; and this was bound up with the shift in the focal point of the world revolution from West to East, which Lenin had taken note of shortly before his death and which had become more pronounced in the several

decades after that. Mao spoke to the basic principle involved here:

What Lenin said and did surpassed Marx in many aspects. Marx did not undertake the October Revolution, but Lenin did; therefore, Lenin surpassed Marx in the practical aspect. At that time, he had the conditions of the time. Marx never undertook China's great revolution; therefore, our practice also surpassed Marx. Principles are created in practice. Marx did not succeed in his revolution, but we did. When such revolutionary practice is reflected in ideology, it becomes theory.<sup>143</sup>

This does not mean, however, that Mao Tsetung Thought is some addition to Marxism-Leninism that is relevant (only) to the "third world," nor still less that it is "Chinese Marxism-Leninism" as at least some of the Chinese revisionists have been known to allege. As pointed out earlier, the greatest of all Mao's contributions is the theory of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, whose basic analysis of the transition to communism, as well as the basic methodology guiding this analysis, has universal application, despite the reversal of the revolution in China — and indeed in order to understand and act upon the profound lessons of this setback. And overall Mao Tsetung Thought represents a qualitative development of Marxism-Leninism. Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought, then, is an integral philosophy and political theory at the same time as it is a living, critical and continuously developing science. It is not the quantitative addition of the ideas of Marx, Lenin and Mao (nor is it the case that every particular idea or policy or tactic adopted or advocated by them has been without error); Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought is a synthesis of the development, and especially the qualitative breakthroughs, that communist theory has achieved since its founding by Marx up to the present time. It is for this reason and in this sense that, as Lenin said about Marxism, it is omnipotent because it is true.

<sup>143</sup> Mao, "Speeches at the Second Session of the Eighth Party Congress," in *Miscellany of Mao Tse-Tung Thought (1949-1968)* (Joint Publications Research Service, 1974, distributed by National Technical Information Service, U.S. Department of Commerce), Part 1, p. 91.

### III. The So-Called "Crisis of Marxism" and the Real Challenges Confronting Marxists Today

#### *1. Against the vulgarization — and idealization — of Marxist materialism*

One of the most damaging consequences of the counter-revolutionary coup in China and China's reversion to the capitalist road, beyond the ideological disorientation this has fostered in the international communist movement and more broadly, has been the fact that it has greatly strengthened the position and influence of the Soviet social-imperialists, materially and ideologically. This is perhaps doubly ironic, since the pressure, including military pressure, of the Soviet Union on China was a major contributing factor to the victory of the revisionists in China and on the other hand these revisionists proclaim the Soviet Union as virtually the sole enemy of humanity (for now at least). Be that as it may, the result is that the Soviet Union is left today as the only pole of "Marxism-Leninism" that exerts major influence in the world. This makes it all the more important to carry out an all-around exposure of Soviet social-imperialism, which at the same time as it has made gains in recent years has also become further engulfed in a deep-going, comprehensive crisis. This task of exposure has been undertaken by our party (as well as others) in a number of different forms — and in a concentrated way in the debate on the Soviet Union (held in New York City, May 19-22, 1983); here I am going to focus on one central theme: how the Soviet revisionists have turned Marxism-Leninism into a caricature, into vulgar materialism in the service of "scientific" ("socialist") imperialism. Since this is a gigantic subject, illustrative examples will be examined, dealing not only with political line but with its ideological-philosophical underpinnings.

To begin with, a question in two parts: which of the following two basic characterizations of communism is by Marx and which by the leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU); and what is the essential difference between them?

Communism is a classless social system with one form of public ownership of the means of production and full social equality of all members of society; under it, the all-round development of people will be accompanied by the growth of the productive forces through continuous progress in science and technology; all the springs of co-operative wealth will flow more abundantly, and the great principle "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" will be implemented. Communism is a highly organized society of free, socially conscious working people in which public self-government will be established, a society in which labor for the good of society will become the prime vital requirement of everyone, a necessity recognized by one and all, and the ability of each person will be employed to the greatest benefit of the people.

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In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and with it also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but itself life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly — only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!

The answer is that the second quote above is from Marx (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p. 17), while the first is from the CPSU<sup>144</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Cited as part of "The Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union" and as part of *The Road To Communism*, p. 509, in V. Kelle and M. Kovalson, *Historical Materialism, An Outline of Marxist Theory of Society*, printed and translated into English by Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 116.

and is obviously taken from Marx; as to the difference, besides the general question of spirit and vision, the key lies in what has been changed — what has been left out, what added and what re-arranged — and the depth of the difference reflected here will become clearer as we go along.

The speeches and writings of Mikhail Suslov over the past two decades are considered major ideological statements by the Soviet rulers. Recently I had a chance to read a collection of such writings and speeches, including a major reply to the polemics by the Communist Party of China (CPC) in the early 1960s on the general line of the international communist movement. In reading Suslov I was struck by the fact that he rivals (I would even say outdoes) the CPC in exposing the depth of his (and generally of Soviet revisionism's) departure from and opposition to Marxism-Leninism (Suslov is attacking, not self-criticizing, but that only makes the point more powerfully). Let's look:

The struggle of world socialism and world imperialism is the main feature of our age, the pivot of the class struggle on a world-wide scale. . . .

A letter of the Central Committee of the CPC dated June 14, 1963 states openly that the center of contradictions in the modern world, "the main zone of the storms of world revolution," are the vast areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America.<sup>145</sup>

As far as I can tell, Suslov is referring to the statement in the CPC "General Line Proposal" ("25-Point Letter") that:

The various types of contradictions in the contemporary world are concentrated in the vast areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America; these are the most vulnerable areas under imperialist rule and the storm-centers of world revolution dealing direct blows at imperialism.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>145</sup> M.A. Suslov, *Marxism-Leninism — The International Teaching of the Working Class*, published and translated into English by Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, p. 142.

<sup>146</sup> Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, "A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement," point 8, in *The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965 — reprinted by Red Star Press Ltd., London, 1976), p. 13.

In identifying these areas as the storm centers of world revolution the CPC was making a correct and extremely important analysis of the situation during the period in which this statement was written, and although there have been many major changes in the world since then, it remains true as a general characterization that the vast areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America are the most fertile areas for revolution. But Suslov immediately makes the thunderous objection that, "This is a blatant revision of the Marxist theory of the historic role of the working class, and belittles the working-class movement of the developed capitalist countries."<sup>147</sup>

What is striking here is not only the political line of the Soviet revisionists but their methodology. This is obviously the statement of people who rely on something other than the truth of their arguments to convince people! Suslov's accusation does not logically follow from the statement in the CPC "General Line Proposal," nor as a matter of fact is Suslov's accusation true. Suslov does not even attempt to prove that it is: he expects people to believe him because he is a leader of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union has not only credentials but guns, tanks and missiles. And the Soviet revisionist position here, as expressed by Suslov, is obviously big-power chauvinist with regard to the oppressed nations and the national liberation movement which was assuming especially powerful expression in Asia, Africa and Latin America precisely at that time. Could anyone with a genuinely scientific, genuinely Marxist-Leninist (or even reasonably sensible) approach deny that the CPC was correct to say that, in the world as a whole and specifically in comparison to the developed capitalist countries and the working-class movement there, the vast areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America were the storm centers of the world revolution, particularly in the 1960s?! But that is not the real argument that Suslov & Co. want to make, anyway. Their "bottom line" is that the struggle against (Western-bloc) imperialism, whether in

<sup>147</sup> Suslov, *Marxism-Leninism*, p. 142.

the advanced capitalist countries or in the oppressed nations, must depend on the Soviet Union — and be subordinate to its interests. As Suslov proclaims: "A leading role in the world revolutionary process belongs to the socialist countries."<sup>148</sup>

Well, let us see what kind of "leadership" Suslov, et al., want to exercise, and how they envision the "socialist countries," and the Soviet Union above all, making their contribution to this "world revolutionary process."

By creating the material and technological basis of socialism and communism, the socialist countries are dealing blow upon blow on imperialism in the decisive sphere of social activity — the sphere of material production.<sup>149</sup>

Now hold it right there! In an overall and ultimate sense production is the fundamental and decisive sphere of social activity, but it certainly is not the decisive activity at all times and under all circumstances. It is not correct to argue, for example, that since production is the fundamental sphere of human activity, the exploited masses in the imperialist countries and the oppressed nations should concern themselves with producing and not with making revolution. Suslov's statement is no less stupid, no less a mockery of dialectical materialism, than such an argument.<sup>150</sup> When the workers and peasants in the capitalist world see the successes of the "socialist countries" in outproducing the capitalist countries, they will become radicalized and want socialism too — so argues Suslov. But, according to this logic, if capital-

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>150</sup> For that matter, in socialist society, too, if the masses do not pay attention, first, to questions of politics, then their production will not for long be socialist but will become capitalist production under the yoke of new exploiters who may very well call themselves "communists." Politics must guide everything in socialist society, production included; it is for that reason that, even while stressing the need to concentrate on production in the first years of the Soviet Republic, Lenin insisted that, "Politics must take precedence over economics. To argue otherwise is to forget the ABC of Marxism." (Lenin, "Once Again on the Trade Unions, the Current Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Bukharin," *CW*, Vol. 32, p. 71.)

ist states have higher economic growth rates and/or higher standards of living for the workers than the "socialist states," then the workers will — indeed should — support capitalism (and in the imperialist countries a number of backward, more bourgeoisified workers have taken exactly this stand, based on believing that the Soviet-bloc countries are actually socialist and comparing their performance with that of the openly capitalist countries in the "decisive sphere" of production). Suslov's argument is the crudest sort of mechanical materialism and economism extended into the sphere of international contention with the rival imperialist bloc — what Suslov really means when he speaks of "economic competition with capitalism."<sup>151</sup>

This same outlook comes through in Suslov's analysis, in another speech, of the modern-day capitalist economy (in the U.S.-led bloc, that is). Unable to conceal his envy at the production technology and technique employed in these imperialist countries, Suslov acknowledges "the fact that in recent decades industrial development rates have risen in certain capitalist countries."<sup>152</sup> He attributes this to "the scientific and technological revolution"<sup>153</sup> — in fact no such "revolution" has taken place nor obviously is it the basis for the economic expansion in a number of these imperialist countries over several decades, which in reality is based on their position in world relations, especially their relations with the oppressed nations. He also at-

<sup>151</sup> Suslov, *Marxism-Leninism*, p. 145.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.* The Soviet revisionists are so filled with religious reverence for science and technology that they attribute mythical powers to them. For example, one prominent Soviet figure in philosophical circles writes that "today, with the development of cybernetics, information theory, symbolic logic, etc., there exist some notions and concepts which do not photograph or copy external objects but are 'symbols,' 'signs' and other forms of reflection of real processes." (M. Iovchuk, *Philosophical Traditions Today*, published and translated into English by Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 161.) But what is new about this? *Sensations*, as Lenin argued, "copy" or "photograph" external objects, but *notions and concepts* have always been more than mere "copies" or "photographs" of reality, they have always been theoretical abstractions. This Soviet revisionist thinks he is updating Lenin in light of modern science and technology; he is only revealing the retrograde nature of Soviet revisionism.

tributes it to "state-monopoly control."<sup>154</sup> While, in fact, this "control" exists in the Soviet bloc but not as the form of capitalism in the imperialist countries outside that bloc, Suslov's view of this, and of monopoly generally, is one that divorces monopoly from its actual capitalist foundations, especially the contradictions of commodity production and the compelling force of anarchy. This finds its political parallel in the "anti-monopoly movement of today [which] includes as an integral part the struggle for democratic reforms undermining the positions of the monopolies" and "Of particular importance . . . a struggle aimed against the militaristic circles of monopoly capital" for peaceful coexistence and the prevention of a new world war.<sup>155</sup> But most essentially, declares Suslov, in spite of the "scientific and technological revolution" and "state-monopoly control," "capitalism is increasingly revealing its bankruptcy in the competition with the socialist world" in the decisive sphere of production.<sup>156</sup> And we have already been told by Suslov what profound political implications this will have, how central it is to the emancipation of the exploited and oppressed masses in the world.

Let's pass on to Suslov's discussion of the questions of imperialism, revolution and world peace. "The alliance of peace-loving forces, as stated in the documents of communist parties, is now in a position to overcome the forces of imperialism and prevent them from unleashing a new world war," we are assured.<sup>157</sup> The reason is that

although the nature of imperialism, its predatory essence remains unaltered, the alignment of forces in the world arena has changed, the place and role of imperialism in world economics and world politics are no longer the same, and its ability to influence the course of events is decreasing. All this is compelling the imperialists to agree to peaceful coexistence.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

A wonderfully magic thing this "alignment of forces in the world arena," which can prevent the imperialists from acting like imperialists and therefore, logically, has the power to eliminate, or at least neutralize the consequences of, the basic contradiction of capitalism and the basic features of its imperialist stage, including the compelling force of anarchy and the need of the imperialists to redivide the world! Is it possible to miss the resounding echo of Kautsky's "theories" here?

Having established the efficacy of this "alignment of forces in the world arena," Suslov argues that it makes possible the peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism (although of course the *possibility* of the need for nonpeaceful methods, to *suppress* the bourgeoisie once you have maneuvered them out of power, cannot be ruled out).<sup>159</sup> He also repeats the Soviet revisionist thesis that there has been a "collapse of the imperialist colonial system," which means that political independence has been won and "the main task for the former colonies, where the political rule of the imperialists has been abolished, is to strengthen their newly-won independence, eradicate colonialism from the national economy and develop the latter rapidly, achieving economic independence and advancing along the path of socio-economic progress."<sup>160</sup> This formulation wipes out the need for political revolution/armed struggle against continuing imperialist domination, in the form of neocolonialism, and against domestic reaction. It is part of a larger Soviet social-imperialist strategy of advocating the so-called noncapitalist path of development in these countries, which means increased state capitalism in combination with and at the service of domination by the Soviet bloc. This is a new variety of imperialist economism — another "creative development" of opportunism by the Soviet revisionists.

Before leaving behind this particular polemic by Suslov (which is so rich in revisionist gems) — and resisting the tempta-

<sup>159</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

tion to dissect Suslov's distortions, and contortions, on why the dictatorship of the proletariat is no longer necessary in the Soviet Union, a "socialist country" — it is important to reflect on the aim and the vision (if it may be called that) of the people running the Soviet Union. "The aim of the communist movement," Nuzlov says, "remains socialism, communism, which brings the peoples of the world peace, labor, freedom, equality, fraternity and happiness."<sup>161</sup> This is no higher a vision — and no different in substance — than the ideal society of the bourgeoisie. Only the Soviet revisionists lend their own particular material and ideological forms to these bourgeois ideals. In fact Suslov reveals as much when he asserts that communists should not

renounce the realization of such slogans as freedom, equality, fraternity and democracy, simply on the grounds that these slogans were advanced by the bourgeois revolution and then distorted and debased by the bourgeoisie once it gained power. We believe, on the contrary, that these slogans should require [acquire? — B.A.] their true meaning and be put into practice, which can be done only on the paths of socialism and communism.<sup>162</sup>

Here it can hardly be said that the narrow horizon of bourgeois right has been crossed in its entirety — or at all.

Much of the specific political content of Suslov's remarks in this polemic reflects the particular position of the Soviet Union in the world — the "alignment of forces in the world arena" — at that time (generally speaking the decade of the 1960s) and its policies in the situation where its imperialist interests were expressed and pursued to a large degree in collusion with U.S. imperialism, in avoiding any serious confrontation with it and in attempting to derail, defuse or outright suppress revolutionary movements before they could upset the whole "world alignment of forces" and perhaps push the Soviet Union into such a confrontation. For example, in another address reprinted in the

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

same collection Suslov celebrates the 150th anniversary of Marx's birth by repeating the injunction that, "The struggle for economic independence is the main feature of the present stage in the national liberation movement."<sup>163</sup> This was in 1968 — when revolutionary national liberation wars were being waged in many parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America and this struggle had reached a high tide! And four years later Suslov was still openly declaring that "our Party considers the abolition of centers of armed conflict throughout the world to be a particularly important task."<sup>164</sup> Since then the Soviet social-imperialists, still in pursuit of their same basic imperialist interests but in a world of greatly intensifying contradictions — including within the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc — have adopted a more militant posture vis-à-vis U.S. imperialism and, sometimes at least, in "support" of armed national liberation struggle against the U.S.-led bloc. But it is important to keep in mind the fundamental unity underlying all the various and differing tactics of the Soviet revisionists and their theoretical rationalizations. Above all what remains constant is the insistence that the Soviet bloc (the "world socialist system") has become the decisive factor in the world arena and the determining force in world history, upon which everything depends,<sup>165</sup> and

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>165</sup> The Soviet revisionists attempt, of course, to attribute this view to Lenin, in order to lend it "orthodoxy" and authority. In *Philosophical Traditions Today* by M. Iovchuk it is stated:

Lenin and his followers have disclosed the economic and social-political content of the current historical epoch as that of the collapse of imperialism, of socialist and national liberation revolutions, of the struggle between two social systems — socialism and capitalism — and the transition to communism. They have singled out the antagonistic interrelation of the two social formations — the emergent socialist formation and the obsolescent capitalist formation — in the process of social development since October 1917. (p. 164)

In fact it is not Lenin's position but that of "his followers" — the Soviet revisionists — that is presented here. After the victory of the October Revolution Lenin did stress the contradiction between the newly emergent socialism in the world on the one hand and world imperialism on the other; but he certainly gave no

together with this the notion of what kind of world this is bringing into being — the "communist" world of bourgeois relations, remaining bourgeois but reorganized under the centralized control and regulated by the computerized planning of philistine technocrat-accountant imperialists with a lofty historic mission: the "building of communism" by

directing all the forces of socialist society in order that our economy develops at a high and steady rate, that its material and technological basis constantly expands and rises to a higher stage, that the efficiency of social production is increased, that the productivity of social labor rises steadily and that, on this basis, the well-being of the Soviet people improves.<sup>166</sup>

To shed more light on the nature and goals of Soviet revisionism it is important to turn to the realm of philosophy and the relationship between this and political line. To begin:

Objective truth is the content of our knowledge, which reflects reality and therefore does not depend either on a human being or on humanity.<sup>167</sup>

So writes a Soviet authority on philosophy, who goes on to argue, however, that "objective truth is *relative*," citing the example that "our knowledge of the electron continuously changed and became more accurate and fuller in the process of the development of knowledge."<sup>168</sup> This is an eclectic mishmash. How could "the content of our knowledge" *not* "depend either on a human being or on humanity"? Or if this means that it exists in-

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less emphasis to the contradiction between imperialism and the oppressed nations comprising the vast majority of people in the world. And Lenin was far too dialectical and materialist to single out one of the major contradictions in the world and freeze it as the central one for an entire historical epoch "since October 1917."

<sup>166</sup> Suslov, *Marxism-Leninism*, p. 241.

<sup>167</sup> A.P. Sheptulin, *Marxist-Leninist Philosophy*, published and translated into English by Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978, p. 151.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 152, emphasis in original.



dependently of human beings, then how is it *relative*? The effect of this eclectics is to create the impression that truth is a *combination* of the objective world and human knowledge, when in fact it is a *reflection*—a correct reflection—in human thought of the independently existing objective world (universe). This eclectics is *idealism* of the pragmatist (or empirio-critical) variety. The political extension of this is to deny that there are universal principles, so that strategy, policies, etc., can be bent to conform to the subjective interests of opportunism, Soviet revisionism in particular. This is perversely revealed in the political conclusion drawn from this philosophical eclecticism:

Any extrapolation of or changes in the specific conditions result in true knowledge turning into false. Thus, the proposition that socialist revolution may be made victorious by peaceful means is not true always and for every country.<sup>169</sup>

In fact, it is not true at all and has never occurred in any country — it is an invention of the Soviet social-imperialists who, these days especially, declare it to be *relative* because they also want to use armed struggle of various kinds in pursuit of their interests and their rivalry with the U.S.-led bloc in particular.

At the same time, and in the service of the same interests, Soviet revisionist philosophy can express its idealism and metaphysics somewhat differently, as for example in its treatment of "laws" and "categories." This same Soviet authority on philosophy (A.P. Sheptulin) writes that

*Concepts reflecting the most essential and fundamental aspects and connections in a field of phenomena are called categories. . . .*

Categories did not all appear simultaneously in the course of history. Each of them is connected with an absolutely definite stage in the development of knowledge. Categories record the universal aspects and relations revealed at a certain stage of development. . . .

Besides, the categories of dialectics are also forms of thinking. . . .

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

Once it has emerged, a new category enters into necessary relations or connections with existing categories, and thus takes its specific place in the totality of knowledge, the place provided by the continuous course of cognition. If categories are arranged in sequence of emergence in the process of the development of knowledge and social practice, we can determine their necessary interrelationship and interconnection.

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The problem of categories was thoroughly studied by Hegel. . . True, Hegel did this within the confines of idealism.<sup>170</sup>

True, the Soviet revisionists also treat the question of categories "within the confines of idealism." The "dance of the categories" described above — a kind of stately minuet where categories, having emerged, enter into relations and connections with already existing categories, each with its rightful place in the ordered scheme of things, and where all becomes clear once lineage is ascertained — calls to mind what Marx wrote in *The Poverty of Philosophy*:

Economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, the abstractions of the social relations of production. M. Proudhon, holding things upside down like a true philosopher, sees in actual relations nothing but the incarnation of these principles, of these categories, which were slumbering — so M. Proudhon the philosopher tells us — in the bosom of the "impersonal reason of humanity."<sup>171</sup>

And sure enough, in his treatment of "laws" Sheptulin comes to more metaphysics — and idealism — of political economy. "Being a general, repeated connection, law is also a *stable* connection," Sheptulin writes.<sup>172</sup> He then cites as an ex-

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., pp. 175, 176, 179, 178, emphasis in original.

<sup>171</sup> Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1978), Chap. 2: "The Metaphysics of Political Economy," pp. 102-103.

<sup>172</sup> Sheptulin, p. 216, emphasis in original.

ample the law of value, which

arose during the decay of primitive communal society, it was operative in slave and feudal societies, and is operative under capitalism and socialism. It will cease to exist only after communism has been built and the need for commodity production has completely disappeared.<sup>173</sup>

Here, with talk about law being a "stable connection," the essential truth is covered up, that the law of value expresses a dynamic relation, a contradiction in the process of motion and change<sup>174</sup> — and that specifically in socialist society it is not correct merely to note that it is "operative," nor simply to insist that its operation is completely different than under capitalism (as the Soviet revisionists do) — what must be grasped and acted upon is that the continuing, if restricted and altered, operation of the law of value under socialism is necessary but also poses the possibility and danger of capitalist restoration, and its restriction must be a question of ongoing attention and struggle. Of course, if the point is to give free rein to the law of value, indeed to the

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Contrast Sheptulin's approach here with the following passage by Marx:

This determination of price by cost of production is not to be understood in the sense of the economists. The economists say that the average price of commodities is equal to the cost of production; that this is a law. The anarchical movement, in which rise is compensated by fall and fall by rise, is regarded by them as chance. With just as much right one could regard the fluctuations as the law and the determination by the cost of production as chance, as has actually been done by other economists. But it is solely these fluctuations, which, looked at more closely, bring with them the most fearful devastations and, like earthquakes, cause bourgeois society to tremble to its foundations — it is solely in the course of these fluctuations that prices are determined by the cost of production. *The total movement of this disorder is its order.* In the course of this industrial anarchy, in this movement in a circle, competition compensates, so to speak, for one excess by means of another. (Marx, *Wage-Labor and Capital*, MESW, Vol. 1, p. 157, emphasis added)

The failure to grasp or apply the dialectical method demonstrated by Marx here is a hallmark of those who distort and/or openly oppose Marx, in the realm of political-economic analysis and more generally.

accumulation of surplus value and to profit in command, then it is better to declare the law of value, as a law, a stable connection which exists — without internal contradiction — "as long as the phenomena representing the given form of motion or thought exist" and is therefore nothing to worry about.<sup>175</sup>

Soviet revisionist philosophy, in the person of the philosophical "authority" Sheptulin, even goes so far as to resurrect the theory that contradiction only develops at a certain point in the relation between things and that prior to this there is only difference, not contradiction. This is the same as the theory of the Deborin school of philosophy which was associated with right opportunist capitulation to bourgeois forces in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and '30s and was widely criticized and discredited in the Soviet Union, when it was socialist, and in the international communist movement generally. Mao Tsetung, in direct opposition to this opportunist viewpoint, stressed:

The universality or absoluteness of contradiction has a twofold meaning. One is that contradiction exists in the process of development of all things, and the other is that in the process of development of each thing a movement of opposites exists from beginning to end.<sup>176</sup>

If what Mao says here is not true then what is the relationship between things in a process if it is not a relation (unity) of opposites, what is this difference if not contradiction? As Marx said about another, equally muddled, notion in the *Gotha Programme*: "Let him understand who can."<sup>177</sup>

However, there is an important point behind Sheptulin's obfuscation here. The point is to stress "harmony, coordination, correspondence, and so on . . ." <sup>178</sup> This is in opposition to Mao, and Lenin, who stressed that such things as stability, rest, identity, equilibrium, etc., are relative while opposition, struggle, mo-

<sup>175</sup> Sheptulin, p. 216.

<sup>176</sup> Mao, *On Contradiction*, SW, Vol. 1, p. 316.

<sup>177</sup> Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p. 19.

<sup>178</sup> Sheptulin, p. 264.

tion, change, etc., are absolute. Reversing the correct relation between these things, and generally distorting dialectics, serves the Soviet revisionists in at least two major political dimensions. One is the promotion of the possibility of the peaceful transition to socialism (provided, of course, reliance is placed on the alignment of forces in the world arena, in which the weight of the Soviet bloc is decisive). Thus, Sheptulin, in talking about qualitative leaps from one state of matter (including society) to another, makes the following distinction:

For all their various forms, leaps can be subdivided into the following two types: (1) leaps taking the form of an explosion; and (2) leaps occurring comparatively slowly, by way of gradually accumulating the elements of a new quality and discarding those of the old.<sup>179</sup>

And guess what? — "A peaceful take-over of political power by the proletariat is an example of this [second — B.A.] type of leap, as applied to society."<sup>180</sup>

The second service derived from this philosophical metaphysics is the re-enforcing of the false notion that in socialist society harmony — and order — are dominant over contradiction — so nobody had better put up any opposition to the established harmonious order. Here is how Sheptulin puts it:

Socialist ownership of the means of production abolishes all grounds for social enmity, unifies the economic interests of people and consolidates their socio-political and ideological unity. The common goal of each individual and society as a whole — the building of communism — leads to a genuine unity of the individual and society. . . .

The unity of society and the individual under socialism does not, however, exclude contradictions between them. These are brought about by the difficulties arising during the building of socialism and communism, and by the lag of people's consciousness behind social being. This explains the anti-

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

social behavior on the part of some members of socialist society, and by other factors [sic]. But these contradictions, first, concern only a few members of socialist society and, second, are successfully overcome in the course of building communism.<sup>181</sup>

From this one would never get the idea that there is any significant social contradiction in socialist countries, definitely not that there is any real danger of capitalist restoration — and certainly not that capitalism has been restored in the Soviet Union while public ownership has been retained — which is just the point. And try to comprehend the outlook of people who would want, who would point with pride to the ideal of a society where there is no significant contradiction and struggle!

While the metaphysics and mechanical materialism in all this is glaring, it is important to point again to its consistent and fundamental idealism, particularly in the form of pragmatism. The notorious invocation of "laws" — along with the treatment of "categories" and such things as the resurrection of the Deborin school of philosophy — is an attempt to rationalize the interests of the Soviet ruling class and to impose an ossified *notion* of socialism on the underlying *reality* of Soviet society, which refuses to adhere to these "laws," "categories," etc., which is in fact not at all socialist and is actually governed by the laws — that is, the contradictions — of capitalism. Here arises sharply the difference between the Marxist and the Soviet revisionist view of laws. In Marxism, and in reality, laws refer to repeated phenomena, to the essence and identity of things, but these things are in contradiction, in motion and in the process of change, both within themselves and in interaction with other things. Thus laws, while they do profoundly reflect material reality, are not frozen or absolute.

Although it is possible to extract much more exposure of Soviet social-imperialism from this book, it is fitting to finish with it by briefly examining the Soviet revisionist view of

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., pp. 496-497.

morality. "Communist morality," according to Sheptulin, "besides the principles of collectivism and comradeship already mentioned," includes

loyalty to the cause of communism; affection for the socialist motherland, honest labor for the sake of society; protection and accumulation of socialist wealth; awareness of social duty and intolerance of infringements on social interests; humane relations and mutual respect; honesty and truthfulness, simplicity and modesty in public and private life; mutual respect in the family and concern for the upbringing of children; intolerance of national and racial hostility; irreconcilable attitude towards enemies of communism, of peace and the freedom of nations; fraternal solidarity with the working people of all countries, with all nations of the world.<sup>182</sup>

Here the Soviet revisionists have made quite an achievement: they have managed not only to reveal the fundamental unity of their outlook and values with those of the openly bourgeois leaders in the world, but they have managed to combine the cherished bromides of both bourgeois liberalism and bourgeois right-wing fundamentalism — only adding a "socialist" here and a "communist" there.

To conclude on how the Soviet revisionists have vulgarized Marxist materialism and degraded it to a philistine doctrine of material incentive and production organization, the following summary from *Historical Materialism, An Outline of Marxist Theory of Society*, provides a useful focus:

Classes come and go, the nature of the contradictions tends to change, but the type of historical development itself remains the same, because it involves the clash of economic and political interests of social groups, the struggle of classes. History began with the most brutal form of man's enslavement under the slave-holding formation and has run towards a gradual moderation of the forms of exploitation, a substitution of economic forms for the extra-economic forms of coercion, a development of material incentives in the results of the pro-

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., pp. 456-457.

ductive activity not only for the owners of the means of production but also for the immediate producers.<sup>183</sup>

It is not very hard to recognize here the vision of socialism and communism as the end point and highest development of this historical process, where "material incentives in the results of the productive activity" for all — though not equally — will reach its zenith and society can inscribe on its banners: "produce more, get more" and "give me mine"!<sup>184</sup> Compare this to the viewpoint in the *Communist Manifesto*, where in response to the bourgeois cliché that communism, by abolishing private property, will eliminate incentive to work, it is pointed out, "According to this, bourgeois society ought long ago to have gone to the dogs through sheer idleness; for those of its members who work, acquire nothing, and those who acquire anything, do not work," and where the consistent standpoint is that of the class of proletarians with *nothing to lose but their chains*, and a world — not "material incentives in the results of the productive activity" but a *world—to win!*<sup>185</sup>

To anyone who would still insist that such people as the Soviet revisionists are Marxists, the following remark by Engels seems the most appropriate response: "Just as Marx used to say, commenting on the French 'Marxists' of the late seventies: 'All I know is that I am not a Marxist.'" <sup>186</sup>

Considerable attention has been devoted to the ideological and political line of the Soviet revisionists because it represents such a concentrated expression of mechanical materialism — and idealism — economism and vulgar evolutionism, all in the service of social-imperialism. Unfortunately, however, tendencies of this kind (or in this direction) have a long history and deep

<sup>183</sup> Kelle and Kovalson, *Historical Materialism*, p. 112.

<sup>184</sup> These same authors are quick to tell us that Marxism's view of social equality means "only . . . equal opportunities of development for all" (ibid., p. 119) — don't laugh!

<sup>185</sup> Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 54.

<sup>186</sup> "Engels to C. Schmidt," (August 5, 1890), Marx and Engels, *Selected Letters*, p. 72.

roots in the international communist movement, have continued to exert considerable influence, even among those who oppose Soviet revisionism, and have contributed in a major way to the disorientation and demoralization of many forces who have striven to uphold Marxism-Leninism and make it a material force among masses of people. Hopefully, what has been focused on here in terms of the Soviet revisionists will, by indicating the nature of these tendencies in their full, and grotesque, development, contribute to the struggle against them and help at the same time to distinguish genuine Marxism-Leninism from them.

Partly out of revulsion at Soviet revisionism (combined with the lack of scientific understanding of it), partly out of class (generally petty-bourgeois) bias, there has developed among some radical circles a trend toward a "return" to the "young Marx." This has been a phenomenon especially in the imperialist countries over the past several decades and has been associated to one degree or another with existentialist trends. One work in particular is generally singled out as the expression of the "young Marx," *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. The "young Marx" that is revealed there is a Marx that is still in many ways an idealist — or, better said, a Marx in motion from idealism to materialism but not having fully ruptured with the former. It is Marx as a humanist, and it reveals how humanism, even of the most radical, "communist" variety, is idealism.

The heart of Marx's viewpoint in these *Manuscripts* is the concept of alienation, which Marx took over from Hegel. Marx applies this specifically to labor — labor in capitalist (and other class-divided) society. In the "later" Marx — in Marx when he has become a Marxist — alienation is used to describe the relationship whereby the workers sell their labor power, thus giving it over (for a wage) to the capitalist to employ in production. But in the *Manuscripts* alienation of labor is presented as a broader concept, which is tied in with the notion of an (ideal) essence of man and its negation in class society. "Free, conscious activity

is man's species character," Marx writes in the *Manuscripts*.<sup>187</sup> Here what is being posited is an essence (character) of man that is ahistorical and transcends the material conditions, and in particular the society, in which people find themselves at any given time. This becomes clearer and its fuller dimension indicated when Marx speaks of the negation of class society: communism.

Communism, writes ("the young") Marx in the *Manuscripts*, represents a "reintegration or return of man to himself, the transcendence of human self-estrangement. . . ."<sup>188</sup> What comes through here is the notion of an ideal state of man, before his self-estrangement with the development of class society; and the notion that communism, while not simply a return to this earlier, ideal condition, is a return to it on a higher level. And communism is

the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e., human) being — a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism [the "early Engels" described communism as "the reconciliation of mankind with nature and with itself" — B.A.], equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man — the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.<sup>189</sup>

The idealism in this vision is apparent. This is a communism without a firm material foundation and it is a view of history which does not yet place the contradiction between productive

<sup>187</sup> Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (New York: International Publishers, 1982), p. 113.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.* The statement by Engels, quoted in the brackets, is from "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy," printed as an appendix in this edition of the *Manuscripts*, p. 204.

forces and production relations as the cornerstone nor fully recognize class struggle as the motive force in the historical transformation of society and in the final achievement of communism. It is therefore not surprising that such a vision of communism would appeal to radicalized petty-bourgeois strata who feel intensely alienated from the dehumanizing relations and values of capitalism but are also alienated from the essential material basis of all this — the material relations of production of that society — and from the material force that is actually capable of overthrowing it: the revolutionary proletariat. On the other hand, in the above vision of communism of the "young Marx" is already revealed not only the seed but much of the substance of the scientific, materialist communism that he was soon to synthesize. As stated before, the *Manuscripts* reflect a Marx in motion — forward to dialectical and historical materialism. The return to the "young Marx" is a retreat; to uphold this "young Marx" in opposition to the "later," fully materialist — and therefore *more fully revolutionary* — Marx is a retrogression and merges with more general retrograde trends, in the Western imperialist countries in particular, which pose themselves against Marxism in its development into Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought.<sup>190</sup> As we shall see, it is these trends, along with others that oppose or depart from Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought, that are in crisis.

<sup>190</sup> This retreat to the "young Marx" is associated in a general way with what has been called "Western Marxism," one of whose distinguishing features is its fundamental opposition to Leninism. In this regard, a "short text," *Considerations on Western Marxism*, by Perry Anderson is of some interest. While it shares the distinguishing features of such "Marxism" — including the typical petty-bourgeois aversion to the dictatorship of the proletariat, usually formulated as revulsion against Stalin and "Stalinism," as well as an idealist and metaphysical approach to the problems of carrying out the socialist transformation of society — it does contain a number of insights. The most significant of these is its analysis of how "Western Marxism" is the product of the defeat of proletarian revolution in the West in Lenin's time and the absence of any mass revolutionary movement of the proletariat (with few exceptions) since then in the Western countries, that this "Marxism" has attempted to wage the struggle against the bourgeoisie in an ideal realm (the realm of ideas) and that "when it proceeded beyond questions of

## 2. On the character of the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution

In *The Foundations of Leninism*, Stalin made the well-known summation that "Leninism is Marxism of the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution."<sup>191</sup> It is nearly sixty years since Stalin wrote that and in this period it has become obvious that, as referred to earlier, this era is not only more protracted but even more complex than was anticipated at that time.

It is certainly not the case that the leaders of the international communist movement, beginning with Marx, held the misconception that the proletarian revolution and the transition to a communist world would be a simple, straight-line affair, accomplished in a few short years or immediately in the wake of the first successful socialist revolution. Even the "young Marx" — in his more materialist aspect — already emphasized:

In order to abolish the *idea* of private property, the *idea* of communism is completely sufficient. It takes *actual* communist action to abolish actual private property. History will come to it; and this movement, which in *theory* we already know to be self-transcending movement, will constitute in *actual fact* a very severe and protracted process.<sup>192</sup>

And after that the (fully) Marxist Marx had the experience of the revolutions of 1848 (and following) and especially of the Paris Commune to sum up, indicating clearly that the historic mission of the proletariat would not be an uninterrupted rapid march

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method to matters of substance, [it] came to concentrate overwhelmingly on study of *superstructures*." (Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, Chap. 4: "Thematic Innovations" [London: Verso Edition, 1979], p. 75, emphasis in original.) Some aspects of this will be discussed in the remainder of this essay.

<sup>191</sup> Stalin, *The Foundations of Leninism*, in *Problems of Leninism*, p. 3.

<sup>192</sup> Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 154, emphasis in original.

down a broad straight highway.<sup>193</sup> As I pointed out in *Conquer the World*, in discussing Marx's summation of the Paris Commune,

it is important to note that Marx wrote in this very summation that the proletarians "will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men" and even before that, twenty years earlier in 1851, he had declared, "we say to workers, you will have to go through fifteen, twenty, fifty years of civil wars and international wars, not only in order to change existing conditions but also in order to change yourselves and fit yourselves for the exercise of political power."<sup>194</sup>

As for how to appreciate the era of imperialism and the pro-

<sup>193</sup> Engels, of course, also contributed to the summation of these historic events and of important developments in the world generally. And Engels, living a decade longer than Marx, began to recognize certain new features in capitalist society which were part of the overall development of capitalism toward imperialism in the last few decades of the nineteenth century. In a letter to Bebel in 1886, for example, Engels notes that there has been a change in the pattern of capitalist crisis, from regularly recurring cycles punctuated by acute crisis to more drawn out and chronic crisis — Engels links this to the diminishing of English domination in the world market. ("Engels to August Bebel in Berlin," January 20-23, 1886, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 370-371.) Though this was still not crisis as it has come to be characterized under imperialism, where world wars are a distinguishing feature and the decisive phase, it was an indication of developments toward this. In sharp contrast to the outlook of the Soviet revisionists, Engels' criticism of some German socialists in 1890 is noteworthy: "to everyone who took part in the discussion 'socialist society' appeared not as something undergoing continuous change and progress but as a stable affair fixed once and for all, which must, therefore, have a method of distribution fixed once and for all." ("Engels to C. Schmidt," August 5, 1890, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Letters*, p. 72.) Thus, despite certain "evolutionary" tendencies by Engels with regard to Germany in the years before his death (referred to earlier), Engels certainly had and conveyed a sense of the tumultuousness and tortuousness of the transformation of society from capitalism to world communism.

<sup>194</sup> *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will*, p. 3. The sources for the two statements by Marx are: *The Civil War in France* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977), p. 76; with the second one cited in R. Palme Dutt, *Fascism and Social Revolution* (San Francisco: Proletarian Publishers, 1974), and Karl Marx, "Revelations Concerning the Communist Trial in Cologne," Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11 (New York: International Publishers), p. 403.

letarian revolution, the dialectical approach demonstrated by Lenin in the following discussion of the era of imperialism (even before the October Revolution) is very significant:

An era is called an era precisely because it encompasses the sum total of variegated phenomena and wars, typical and untypical, big and small, some peculiar to advanced countries, others to backward countries. To brush aside these concrete questions by resorting to general phrases about the "era," as Kievsky does, is to abuse the very concept "era."<sup>195</sup>

And in the same work Lenin also made clear that:

The social revolution can come only in the form of an epoch in which are combined civil war by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in the advanced countries and a *whole series* of democratic and revolutionary movements, including the national liberation movement, in the undeveloped, backward and oppressed nations.<sup>196</sup>

But a general orientation, while fundamental, does not provide the solution to every concrete, or every concretely decisive, event or question that arises in the course of a process (indeed this was Lenin's point in his polemic on the question of an era). And the fact that not only is the process of proletarian revolution and the world-historic transition to communism proving to be more variegated and more prolonged than previously anticipated, but also that it has been marked by severe setbacks — particularly the successive reversals of the two great breakthroughs and the loss of the two great bulwarks of the proletarian world revolution, in Russia and (not that long after) in China — all this has resulted in considerable disillusionment, disorientation and the retreat into outright opportunism, cynical defeatism, agnosticism, and so on, among a number of erstwhile

<sup>195</sup> Lenin, "A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism," *CW*, Vol. 23, pp. 36-37.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60, emphasis in original.

revolutionaries, including Marxist-Leninist forces.<sup>197</sup>

A central question in all this is the fact that a basic feature of the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution is that socialist states will be established one (or a few) at a time and will for a long time exist in a world where imperialism is still dominant and in an overall sense encircles them. The correct handling of the contradiction between defending the socialist states that have been established — and not merely defending but further transforming them — on the one hand and promoting

<sup>197</sup> There are, of course, a number of different tendencies which, from various (and often opposing) viewpoints, deny that historic breakthroughs were made in the Soviet Union and China, or assert that the revolution was quickly betrayed (if it occurred at all) in these countries and the state quickly degenerated into an oppressive apparatus over the proletariat and masses, etc. — or, on the other hand that there has been no reversal or loss in one (or both) of these countries and socialism — realistic, not utopian, idealistic socialism — is continuing to advance triumphantly there. I have spoken fairly extensively to these questions elsewhere, including some analysis of the mistakes as well as the contributions of the historical leaders of the international communist movement and of the socialist countries (see especially *Conquer the World*) and in this essay my approach is to touch on these questions, or aspects of them, as they relate to the main points addressed here. Two things should be said at this point, however: (1) our party obviously does not agree with the tendencies summarized just above: our position is that the Soviet Union was a socialist country when it was led by Lenin and Stalin — despite errors, even grievous errors in the case of the latter, that were committed — and that the destruction of socialism in the USSR came in the mid-1950s, beginning with the rise to power of revisionism there, personified and led at that time by Khrushchev; and that China under the leadership of Mao Tsetung not only embarked and remained on the socialist road for nearly three decades after 1949 but made the greatest advances so far on that road, through the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution; this process was reversed and capitalist restoration initiated with the revisionist coup after Mao's death in 1976; and (2) one particular error that was very pronounced under Stalin's leadership, and which is of particular importance in relation to the questions being addressed here, was the notion that with the advent of imperialism and still more with the victory of the October Revolution and the consolidation of a socialist state in the Soviet Union, capitalism entered a period of "general crisis" characterized by a continual, more or less uninterrupted, decline (in inverse relationship to the ongoing advance of socialism). For a thorough critique of this theory see the forthcoming book *America in Decline: An Analysis of the Developments Toward War and Revolution, in the U.S. and Worldwide, in the 1980s*, Vol. 1, by Raymond Lotta with Frank Shannon (Chicago: Banner Press, 1983), but here it should be pointed out that such an erroneous theory — which became conventional wisdom in the international communist movement and still exerts considerable influence, even among genuine Marxist-Leninists — has been a significant factor contributing to the disorientation, demoralization, etc., referred to above.

the overall advance of the world revolution, which must be the main aspect, on the other hand, has proved to be an extremely difficult problem. In the experience of the Soviet Union and even of China, when they were socialist, serious errors were made in relation to this, especially at crucial points when this contradiction assumed an especially intense expression — when both the dangers to the socialist states (in particular the danger of outright military assault by imperialism) and the possibility of advancing the world revolution became concentrated and magnified. This was above all the case with the conjunctures shaping up around World War 2 and the (current) approach to a new world war: first Stalin and later Mao (though in less grotesque form) made the error of adopting and applying strategies which subordinated the revolutionary struggles in other parts of the world to the defense of the socialist country on the basis of building alliances with one bloc of imperialists against the other. These policies and the maneuvers (and it must be said, in some cases — machinations) they involved had much to do with the disorientation, demoralization and desertion from the ranks of revolution and communism alluded to above.

But even where errors have not been made (or have not been of great significance), the *necessity* imposed on the socialist countries because of their position in the (imperialist-dominated) world, and the ways in which this has interacted with the class struggle inside the socialist countries themselves, has led to some disorientation and disillusionment among erstwhile supporters, especially where this necessity demanded a tactical retreat. This was sharply manifest in the first few, desperate years of the Soviet Republic, when Lenin insisted on compromises with the imperialists in various forms and when some of the breakthroughs of the revolution could not be maintained at the high point they had attained but had to be consolidated at a lower level. One striking example of the latter is the fact that the Soviets had to be brought under tighter centralized party control and even rebellions of sections of the masses in the Soviets had to be crushed in order to maintain the dictatorship of the proletariat as a whole in the early 1920s. This, for many former en-



thusiasts or fellow-travelers of the revolution, represented the betrayal of the revolution (an analogous situation is the necessity in China, recognized and acted upon by Mao, to abandon a Paris Commune-like form of proletarian dictatorship and administration — such as that briefly established in Shanghai — in favor of revolutionary committees during the Cultural Revolution: a tremendous gain had been made, as represented by the revolutionary committees, but because a more advanced step had to be retreated from there was among some a feeling of defeat or even betrayal). What is actually betrayed here is the lack of understanding that the socialist revolution, including the revolutionary initiative, tenseness and enthusiasm of the masses, does not go forward on a straight-line continuum but proceeds in a spiral-like fashion and further that this is fundamentally conditioned by objective material reality — and its motion and development — not only in the socialist country itself but above all on a world scale.

Lacking an understanding of this (or a firm grasp of it) — and of the dialectical materialist method of which it is an expression — can only result in disorientation and even desertion in the face of the genuinely arduous and tortuous struggle to carry out the revolutionary transition to communism worldwide and particularly in the face of sharp turns or, above all, sudden setbacks. Or else there will be an attempt to leap over objective necessity in a single bound — which, when it lands in disaster, as it must, will lead to perhaps even worse defeatism and defection. In this light a letter written to the *Revolutionary Worker* and forwarded to me not long ago is instructive. Seemingly carried away with the struggle against social-chauvinism and for an uncompromising proletarian internationalism, the writer asks:

Shouldn't the whole concept of nation-states be viewed as inherently an aspect of imperialism (and therefore inherently evil)? Isn't the creation of socialist states a contradiction, and doesn't it play right into the enemy's hands and even open the door to reactionary, revisionist and counterrevolutionary forces? ultimately ending up in a form of "socialist" national-chauvinism? (and even social-imperialism?!).

And the conclusion is:

Let's (*instead*) abandon the interim goal of socialist nation-states. Let's push the whole thing forward all the way this time (even if the battle lasts a hundred years) and not consolidate in a former nation-state now under our control and give it a socialist name. Rather, let's not think of it as a nation-state any longer but merely as a territorial part of the world, which in fact it is! [emphasis in original]

What came to my mind in reading this was, first, Lenin's comment about many of the "left-wing" communists he was criticizing — their spirit, their hatred for the enemy and their impatience to be rid of this system, is absolutely indispensable for making revolution, but their political understanding is profoundly and dangerously mistaken. Secondly, and more specifically related to this letter, it brought to mind Lenin's insistence that:

In the same way as mankind can arrive at the abolition of classes only through a transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, it can arrive at the inevitable integration of nations only through a transition period of the complete emancipation of all oppressed nations, i.e., their freedom to secede.<sup>198</sup>

For one of the most significant and harmful effects of rejecting the concept of nation-states would be — ironically in the case of this writer — to promote chauvinism toward the great majority of nations and peoples in the world, in the oppressed nations where national liberation and the formation of nation-states freed from imperialist domination is on the historical agenda, indeed is the immediate task, without which the transition to communism is unthinkable. But more generally, there will be the need to establish socialist states where the power of capital is overthrown, even in formerly imperialist countries, exactly

<sup>198</sup> Lenin, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination," *CW*, Vol. 22, p. 147.

because the proletarian revolution (like everything else) proceeds not in an uninterrupted (if long-term) straight-line process, but through spirals; and just as it is absolutely essential to conquer as much as can be conquered in those periods when revolutionary possibilities are greatly accentuated, so it is absolutely essential to consolidate what has been won, especially when no more can be won for the time. Overall, advance is principal over consolidation, but advance and consolidation, being a unity of opposites, cannot exist without each other and are interrelated, so that there is no such thing as advance completely divorced from consolidation or advance which does not also demand consolidation, just as there is no consolidation without advance.

I said advance and consolidation are a unity of opposites, which means a contradiction; and it is true that the main, even overwhelming error in handling this contradiction — specifically in terms of the relation between defending socialist countries vis-à-vis making further advances in the world revolution — has been to subordinate the latter to the former rather than the other way around. But attempting to deal with this problem by going to the opposite extreme and negating the need for consolidation, obliterating the task of establishing and defending socialist states as a crucial part of the worldwide transition to communism (or even giving insufficient importance to this task) will never lead to the final aim of communism, it will only lead to defeat and defeatism — defeatism turned inside out and appearing super-revolutionary, but defeatism nonetheless.

This era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution and the problem of the transition to communism worldwide have been further complicated by what I described in *Conquer the World* as the "lopsidedness in the world." What this refers to is the fact that in the world today the advanced productive forces are concentrated in a handful of the advanced — that is, imperialist — countries while the economies of most of the countries in the world are not simply backward but distorted, disarticulated in their development because of imperialist domination and plunder. Accompanying this is the fact that in these imperialist countries large sections of the people, including of the

working class, are not, in "normal times" (which may last literally for decades), living in desperate conditions and impelled to seek a radical change, while in the colonial and dependent countries the masses are in such conditions and driven toward seeking revolutionary change (or at least are favorable to it) but the proletariat there is generally a small part of the population and the revolution that is on the agenda there and which corresponds to the class position and interests of most of the masses (who are small producers) is a bourgeois-democratic revolution, even if of a new type. Corresponding to this in the sphere of politics and ideology, and within the Marxist movement in particular (broadly defined), has been the marked tendency (of avowed Marxists) toward social-democracy in the imperialist countries and toward nationalism in the oppressed nations (though the latter has the virtue of often assuming a revolutionary expression, even if not a thoroughly Marxist-Leninist one).

As for the former tendency (and leaving aside the pro-Soviet revisionists who basically mirror the outlook and policies of their mentors), this social-democracy finds its material base, as previously mentioned, in the absence of any revolutionary movement of the proletariat in these imperialist countries. But ideological and political questions play a considerable role here as well, and they interpenetrate with the question of material basis. As a general rule revolutionary parties, movements, etc., are initiated by intellectuals who then face the task of linking up with oppressed masses and transforming their revolutionary ideas into a material force. In the imperialist countries — and this has been especially marked in Europe — such radical-minded intellectuals have tended either to tail behind the mass of the workers, who overwhelmingly in numbers and decidedly in outlook have not been revolutionary, and still are not, or else they have recoiled from this and sought to find some other social base for their radicalism. The irony has been that in these countries there are class forces favorable to proletarian revolution — and particularly within the proletariat itself, including a significant number of immigrants and oppressed nationalities in most

of these countries — but the outlook of these intellectuals has largely prevented them from recognizing and acting upon this, sending them instead for their social base to various petty-bourgeois strata that are crushed, ruined and alienated under the system.

Here the national question — and in particular rupturing with the framework of the imperialist nation and taking a firmly internationalist stand both with regard to the world as a whole and also with regard to oppressed nationalities, immigrants and so on within the imperialist countries themselves — is a crucial aspect of the problem. Only by making such a rupture, and by viewing things from the point of view of the world arena above all and taking up the question of the social forces for revolution in the country concerned on an internationalist basis (as just discussed) will it be possible to adopt and maintain a revolutionary communist stand. This in turn links up with the need to abandon the notion of one big mass movement advancing uniformly to socialism, of economism in all its forms, and to grasp the profound importance and strategic implications of the split in the working class in the imperialist countries — all decisive aspects of Leninism. Without such ruptures and such a class analysis and strategic orientation it will remain impossible to cross beyond the bounds of bourgeois democracy, and the radicalism of the intellectual will remain the ideological and political expression of the frustrated and outraged petty bourgeoisie. Here the following explanation by Marx is very relevant: one must not imagine

that the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven from earth. What makes them representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically. This is, in general, the relation-

ship between the *political* and *literary representatives* of a class and the class they represent.<sup>199</sup>

When this kind of petty-bourgeois radicalism has found expression under the banner of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought it has generally done so on the basis of drawing inspiration from the mass upsurge of the Cultural Revolution in China, the mass revolt against the newly engendered bureaucratic-bourgeoisie in the party and state, taking over some of the slogans and innovations of that struggle, transforming them into economist and bourgeois-democratic prejudices — "the masses, the masses, the masses" and opposed to them "bureaucratic" party leaders and party structures divorced from their class content — and attempting to apply these to a nonrevolutionary situation in capitalist society. This obviously has a strong anti-Leninist current and generally finds unity — openly or at least objectively — with the idealist and imperialist-economist "Western Marxism" referred to earlier. It is "Marxism" (and "Marxism-Leninism" and "Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought") of *this* kind that today finds itself in severe crisis, where it has not dissipated itself altogether.

If, in part, then, the crisis of the Marxist movement in the West (the Western imperialist countries) is a reflection of the shifting of the focal point of the world revolutionary movement from West to East — which was accelerated after World War 2 — it is also a reflection of the fact that there has not been a corresponding ideological development within the Marxist movement in these imperialist countries. That is, the Marxists there (again, broadly speaking, to include all the self-proclaimed Marxists) have refused to recognize this shift and/or they have drawn backward and chauvinist conclusions from the objective fact of this shift and its consequences, attempting to develop a "Western Marxism" more acceptable to the bourgeoisified workers and petty-bourgeois strata on whom they base

<sup>199</sup> Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Chap. 3, MESW, Vol. 3, p. 424, emphasis in original.

themselves, more suitable to the Western capitalist countries and their "democratic traditions," than what they regard as the deformed, authoritarian, peasant-influenced Marxism that began with Lenin and developed further with Mao. But unless and until precisely this Marxism is applied (in its basic principles and methodology) in the Western imperialist countries, there will be no prospects for socialist revolution there even if and even when the objective conditions for it appear.<sup>200</sup>

In the oppressed nations, nationalism commonly takes the form of absolutizing the fact that these oppressed nations have become the most fertile soil for revolution — and along with this the tendency to negate the class content of revolution, obliterating the distinction between bourgeois-democratic and proletarian-socialist revolution — regarding the imperialist countries and their populations as one undifferentiated reactionary mass in opposition to the "third world" and to the international revolutionary struggle (to the degree that such a struggle is conceived). In periods of revolutionary upsurge, such as swept the "third world" in the 1960s (and into the early 1970s) when the contradiction between the oppressed nations and imperialism was the main and most decisive contradiction in the

<sup>200</sup> A further irony in all this is that a common slander that is made against Marxism, especially by reactionary nationalists in the oppressed nations, is that it is a "European ideology" (it is sometimes even said it is a racist ideology). In large part justification for this is sought in the fact that Marx and Engels focused their attention overwhelmingly on Europe. In fact, it was absolutely correct for them to do so, since during their lifetimes Europe was the most important arena of class struggle, and even of national liberation struggle (though led by the bourgeoisie), in the world. At the same time, however, Marx and Engels not only analyzed important developments in the colonial countries and oppressed nations, they supported rebellions and liberation struggles in the oppressed nations, including not only Ireland but India, China and Persia, and they pointed to the repercussions of such movements in the colonizing capitalist countries and to important links between the struggles in the two types of countries. (See *Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions*, Chap. 1: "Revolution in Colonial Countries".) And as repeatedly emphasized in this essay, with the development of imperialism and with the shift in the focal point of revolutionary struggle from West to East, Marxism has undergone a further development which recognizes and encompasses these objective changes, so that today the claim that Marxism is a European (or racist) ideology is all the more ridiculous and reactionary.

world, the revolutionary aspects of this nationalism tend to come to the fore. But in recent years, with the shift in the world situation and the development of the interimperialist contradiction (between the U.S.-led bloc and the Soviet-led bloc) into the principal contradiction, there have been significant changes in the "third world." First, there has been up to this point a certain ebbing in the national liberation struggles on the whole. At the same time, however, and as part of the overall shift in world relations and contradictions, the Soviet social-imperialists, as part of their assuming a more militant posture vis-à-vis the rival imperialist bloc, have made more inroads and exerted more influence in a number of national liberation movements that have had an important impact not only in a particular country or area but on the world situation.<sup>201</sup> On the other hand, and also related to these other basic changes, the revisionists in China, upon coming to power, have more and more openly collaborated with U.S. imperialism and its allies in opposition to the Soviet Union and to virtually every national liberation struggle in which the Soviet social-imperialists are even seriously attempting to exert influence and gain a foothold (which is almost in every case). Lin Biao-ism has been replaced by Deng Xiaoping-ism as the dominant form of nationalist influence in the Communist Party of China — indeed Deng Xiaoping-ism has become the dominant line in that party.

Partly in response to this and partly because necessary ruptures have not been made, there is a tendency even among gen-

<sup>201</sup> One peculiar phenomenon in relation to all this has been the increasing spectacle of bourgeois and reactionary forces that are aligned with the Soviet bloc in the "third world" donning the mantle of Marxism-Leninism. The essence of this was starkly and somewhat comically exposed in recent years with the game of "musical Marxist-Leninist" that was played by the Soviet social-imperialists in the Horn of Africa (when the music stops — when the alignments change — change the Marxist-Leninist label from one head to another). For a while the military dictatorship in Somalia was aligned with the Soviet bloc so it got to be called "Marxist-Leninist"; then there was a changing of partners (blocs), with Somalia going over to the U.S. bloc and Ethiopia, Somalia's adversary, switching to the Soviet side, so now the Dergue in Ethiopia gets to be called "Marxist-Leninist."

uine Marxist-Leninist forces, who uphold Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought, to cling to at least aspects of Lin Biao-ism. Lin Biao was a top leader of the Communist Party of China in the 1960s and he is associated with the line of singling out U.S. imperialism for a common onslaught from the "third world," with simultaneous national liberation wars defeating U.S. imperialism throughout the "third world," and even possibly destroying it altogether. His line (as expressed in a 1965 pamphlet [written by Lin Biao], *Long Live the Victory of People's War*) represented the absolutizing of what was then the principal contradiction in the world (between the oppressed nations and imperialism) — raising it out of the context of world relations and contradictions in which it actually exists and treating it as a thing unto itself and virtually the only significant contradiction in the world. While recognizing the existence of revolutionary situations and favorable revolutionary prospects in many countries in the "third world" it exaggerated this into a tendency to treat the "third world" as an undifferentiated whole, ripe everywhere for revolution. Related to this, in upholding the importance of armed struggle as the necessary means for replacing the old order with the new and insisting on the fact that in many places in the "third world" it was possible and necessary to make armed struggle the main and immediate form of struggle — in opposition to the Soviet revisionist line that attempted to make economic development the main task in the "third world" neocolonies — Lin Biao's line exaggerated this to the point of virtually insisting that everywhere in the "third world" revolutionary warfare could and must be launched right away (in *Long Live the Victory*, whether one dares to wage a people's war is made the touchstone for distinguishing Marxism-Leninism from revisionism). As part of this whole line, the objective fact that the proletarian revolution had been delayed in the imperialist countries and that there was as yet no proletarian-revolutionary movement there was also absolutized, so that the prospect of such revolution in the imperialist countries was all but dismissed.

All these errors, as serious as they were, did not prevent Lin

Biao-ism from being, in the main, a revolutionary expression in the world situation of the 1960s. Nor did the fact that this line treated the Soviet revisionists as merely capitulators to U.S. imperialism — and not really as serious imperialist rivals — have such serious negative consequences at a time when, unlike today, the relationship between the Soviet Union and the U.S. was more characterized by collusion than contention. But to attempt to cling to Lin Biao-ism in the world situation of today, with all its profound changes since the 1960s, including in the principal contradiction in the world, can only have very serious and ultimately disastrous consequences.<sup>202</sup>

The road forward, confronted with the present world situation and with the particular problems posed by the basic features of this era, including the "lopsidedness" to which I have referred, is in fact the road indicated by Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought — grasped as an integral philosophy and political theory, as explained earlier. If Lenin could lead a socialist revolution in backward Russia, if Mao Tsetung could guide overwhelmingly peasant masses under proletarian leadership on a tortuous course of struggle not only to achieve socialism in China but to advance the international proletariat to its highest pinnacle yet through the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, then why cannot those today who are carrying forward and building on this legacy find the ways to make decisive breakthroughs, in the colonial and dependent countries and in the imperialist countries too, guided by a common outlook and practice of proletarian internationalism? Especially today this is not a pious wish but an increasingly urgent demand. As the *New Programme* of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA states:

There are moments rare in history. They may come only once in decades, but when they do, they place tasks and forms of struggle before the proletariat and oppressed peoples of the world which influence the course of things for decades to come. Today the world, including the U.S., is entering such a

<sup>202</sup> It is not fortuitous that Lin Biao himself became a counterrevolutionary at the time of the shift in the world situation in the late 1960s and early 1970s, ending up in pro-Soviet apostasy, attempting (and failing in) a coup in 1971.

period. It is a time of crisis for a system which has subjected millions here and hundreds of millions internationally to daily agony, a system which in its normal times has almost uninterrupted wars of plunder from one end of the globe to another. Such is the imperialist system, which is once again caught in a desperate and deepening economic and political crisis, fast approaching the point of worldwide explosion.<sup>203</sup>

It is out of all this that the greatest possible gains for the international proletariat must be seized and it is for this that we must be actively working and preparing. In the final analysis, as Engels once expressed it, the proletariat must win its emancipation on the battlefield. But there is not only the question of winning in this sense but of how we win in the largest sense. One of the significant if perhaps subtle and often little-noticed ways in which the enemy, even in defeat, seeks to exact revenge on the revolution and sow the seed of its future undoing is in what he would force the revolutionaries to become in order to defeat him. It will come to this: we will have to face him in the trenches and defeat him amidst terrible destruction but we must not in the process annihilate the fundamental difference between the enemy and ourselves. Here the example of Marx is illuminating: he repeatedly fought at close quarters with the ideologists and apologists of the bourgeoisie but he never fought them on their terms or with their outlook; with Marx his method is as exhilarating as his goal is inspiring. We must be able to maintain our firmness of principles but at the same time our flexibility, our materialism and our dialectics, our realism and our romanticism, our solemn sense of purpose and our sense of humor.

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Today, despite severe setbacks in recent years, the objective world situation is far more favorable for proletarian revolution than at the time of Marx's death a hundred years ago. In this, the

<sup>203</sup> *New Programme and New Constitution of the RCP, USA* (Chicago: RCP Publications, May 1, 1981), p. 3.

era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution, and especially with the present approach of a world-historic conjuncture, the profound truths that Marx brought to light concerning the fundamental contradictions of capitalism and their resolution through proletarian revolution assume more intensive and more extensive expression — they have been heightened and more fully internationalized. In the period when Marx died, Lenin said, "after the defeat of the Paris Commune, history made slow organizational and educational work the task of the day. Nothing else was possible."<sup>204</sup> Today that is anything but the case: the problem in this period is not that revolutionary possibilities may not arise but that they may not be seized — or may be thrown away. We must not be unprepared and must not leave the international proletariat unprepared for those great days in which decades are concentrated, and we must not repeat the historical error of sounding a retreat just when the opportunities no less than the difficulties are the greatest.

*The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.*

The Communist Manifesto

*The current conjuncture in the world and in the international movement presents the revolutionary proletariat, the oppressed peoples and the Marxist-Leninists with great tasks, trials and, above all, great opportunities. Marxism-Leninism, the science of the revolutionary proletariat, has always been forged and tempered in the furnace of class struggle. Today we must rise to meet the challenges before us, race to catch up with the rapid developments of the objective conditions, reconstruct the unity of Marxist-Leninists on the basis of a correct line and summing up the experience of the past, fight for proletarian internationalism — and in so doing push ahead the advance toward communism throughout the world.*

Joint Communiqué, "To The Marxist-Leninists,  
The Workers, And The Oppressed Of All Countries"  
— Autumn 1980

<sup>204</sup> Lenin, "The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution," *CW*, Vol. 24, p. 86.



**An Essay Marking  
the 100th Anniversary of Marx's Death**

"We, in our turn, must also understand the specific features and tasks of the new era. Let us not imitate those sorry Marxists of whom Marx said: 'I have sown dragon's teeth and harvested fleas.'"

V. I. Lenin

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