

# World Revolutionary Perspectives.

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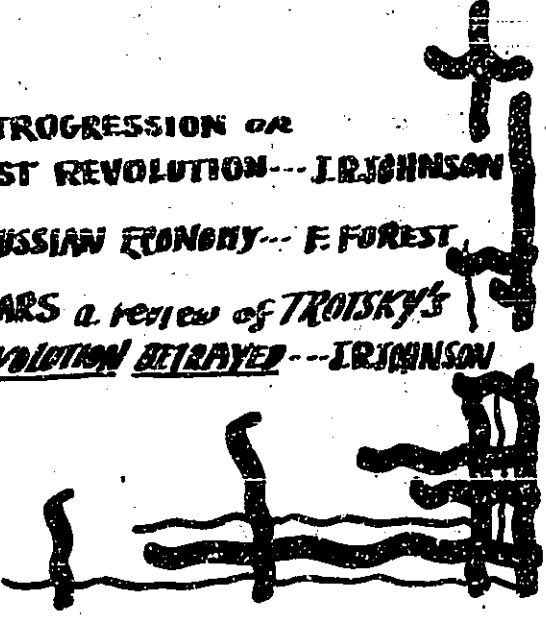
# Russian Question

HISTORICAL RETROGRESSION OR  
SOCIALIST REVOLUTION---IR. JOHNSON

THE NATURE OF RUSSIAN ECONOMY--- F. FOREST

AFTER TEN YEARS a review of TROTSKY'S  
THE REVOLUTION BETRAYED---IR. JOHNSON

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WORLD REVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES

AND THE  
RUSSIAN QUESTION

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## DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AND THE FATE OF HUMANITY

Mankind has obviously reached the end of something. The crisis is absolute. Bourgeois civilization is falling apart, and even while it collapses, devotes its main energies to the preparation of further holocausts. Not remote states on the periphery but regimes contending for world power achieve the most advanced stages of barbarism known to history. What civilized states have ever approached Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia in official lies, official murder and the systematic brutalization and corruption of their populations? Only a shallow empiricism can fail to see that such monstrous societies are not the product of a national peculiarity (the German character) or a system of government ("Communism") but are part and parcel of our civilization. Everything that has appeared in these monstrous societies is endemic in every contemporary nation. Millions in the United States know that Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia will have nothing to teach the American bourgeoisie when it finds itself threatened by the revolutionary American workers seeking that complete expression of democracy which is socialism. The dream of progress has become the fear of progress. Men shrink with terror at the hint of new scientific discoveries. If it were known tomorrow that the crown of human technical achievement, the processes of manufacturing atomic energy, had been lost beyond recovery, this scientific disaster would be hailed as the greatest good fortune of decades.

But the seal of the bankruptcy of bourgeois civilization is the bankruptcy of its thought. Its intellectuals run to and fro squealing like hens in a barnyard when a plane passes overhead. Not a single philosopher or publicist has any light to throw on a crisis in which the fate not of a civilization but of civilization itself is involved. The Keynesian theories, yesterday's salvation, are already part of the history of economics. The ridiculous Four Freedoms of the late President Roosevelt take their place with the Three Principles of Sun Yat Sen, the thousand years of Hitler's Reich and the Socialism in a Single Country of Stalin. The chattering of Sidney Hook and Harold Laski is stunned into silence by the immensity of their own inadequacies. Thought has abdicated. The world is rudderless. All illusions have been destroyed. "Man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind." And in face of this the bourgeoisie has nothing to say.

The method of thinking is rooted in society. Bourgeois thought has collapsed because bourgeois society has collapsed. The writers of the articles here reprinted are united not only in their political conclusions but in their rejection of the bourgeois method of thinking, and the unreserved acceptance of the Hegelian Dialectic in its Marxian form. We have learnt by hard necessity the truth of the following dictum of Trotsky: "Hegel in his Logic established a series of laws: change of quantity into quality, development through contradictions, conflict of content and form, interruption of continuity, change of possibility into inevitability, etc., which are just as important for theoretical thought as is the simple syllogism for more elementary tasks." (In Defense of Marxism, p. 51) The members of the Johnson-Forest tendency who have to work out theoretical problems believe this. We try to practice it. It is to assist ourselves and some of our younger comrades that we deal here with the method itself.

### I. THE LAW OF CONTRADICTION

#### The Theory of the Law

The basic laws of dialectic, and unfortunately, very little else about it, are familiar to most students of Marxism. They are briefly stated and their movement recapitulated on the first page of this reprint. The first and most important of them is the one variously known as the principle of contradiction, the unit or interpenetration of opposites.

Hegel defines the principle of Contradiction as follows: "Contradiction is the root of all movement and life, and it is only insofar as it contains a contradiction that anything moves and has impulse and activity." (Science of Logic)

The first thing to note is that Hegel makes very little attempt to prove this. A few lines later he says: "With regard to the assertion that contradiction does not exist, that it is non-existent, we may disregard this statement."

We here meet one of the most important principles of the dialectical logic, and one that has been consistently misunderstood, vilified or lied about. Dialectic for Hegel was a strictly scientific method. He might speak of inevitable laws, but he insists from the beginning that the proof of dialectic as scientific method is that the laws prove their correspondence with reality. Marx's dialectic is of the same character. Thus, Marx excluded what later became the Critique of Political Economy from Capital because it took for granted what only the detailed argument and logical development of Capital itself could prove. Still more specifically, in his famous letter to Kugelmann on the theory of value, he ridiculed the idea of having to "prove" the labor theory of value. If the labor theory of value proved to be the means whereby the real relations of bourgeois society could be demonstrated in their movement, where they came from, what they were, and where they were going, that was the proof of the theory. Neither Hegel nor Marx knew any other scientific proof. To ask for some other proof of the laws, as Burnham implied, or to prove them "wrong" as Sidney Hook tried to do, this is to misconceive dialectical logic entirely. Hegel complicated the question by his search for a completely closed system embracing all aspects of the universe. This no Marxist ever did. The frantic shrieks that the Marxian dialectic is some sort of religion or teleological construction, proving inevitably the victory of socialism, spring usually from men who are frantically defending the "inevitability", i.e. the permanence, of bourgeois democracy against the proletarian revolution.

So convinced a Marxist as Trotsky reminded the revolutionaries in 1939, that Marxists were not fatalists. "If," said he, "the international proletariat, as a result of the experience of our entire epoch and the current new war, proves incapable of becoming the master of society, this would signify the foundering of all hope for a socialist revolution, for it is impossible to expect any other more favorable conditions for it." The Marxian expectation of socialism arising from the contradictions of capitalism would have proved itself to be Utopia.

The law of contradiction is what for the moment we can call a "hypothesis" for the grouping of empirical facts. [All men use hypotheses for the grouping of facts. That is what logic consists of. The popular bourgeois hypotheses are for the most part unconscious. They are the "inevitability" of bourgeois society, natural division of labor, more particularly of men into capitalists and workers, constantly expanding technical progress, constantly expanding production, constantly expanding democracy, constantly rising culture. But during the last thirty years, these have crumbled to dust in their hands. They have no hypotheses they can believe in and that is why they cannot think. Historical facts, large and small, continuously deliver shattering blows at the foundation of their logical system. Nothing remains for them but the logic of the machine-gun, and the crude empiricism of police violence.

Quite different is the thought of Marxism. It understands its own logical laws. For Marxists, the fundamental logical law is the contradictory nature of all phenomena and first of all, of human society. The dialectic teaches that in all historical forms of society, the increasing development of material wealth brings with it the increasing degradation of the large mass of humanity. Capitalism, being the greatest wealth-producing system so far known, has carried this

In his article in the Marxist Quarterly, April, June, 1937. More urgent duties have prevented the puncturing of this article which for ten years has been a Bible for the anti-dialecticians.

contradiction to a pitch never before known. Thus it is that the moment when the world system of capitalism has demonstrated the greatest productive powers in history is exactly the period when barbarism threatens to engulf the whole of society. The anti-dialecticians stand dumbfounded before the spectacle of the mastery of nature for human advancement and the degradation of human nature by this very mastery. The greater the means of transport, the less men are allowed to travel. The greater the means of communication, the less men freely interchange ideas. The greater the possibilities of living, the more men live in terror of mass annihilation. The bourgeoisie cannot admit this, for to admit it is themselves to sanction the end of bourgeois civilization. Hence the complete paralysis of bourgeois thought. Yet never was thought of a fundamental character so necessary to mankind. As our political tendency has recently written:

"It is precisely the character of our age and the maturity of humanity that obliterates the opposition between theory and practice, between the intellectual preoccupation of the 'educated' and of the masses. All the great philosophical concepts, from the nature of the physical universe (atomic energy) through the structure and function of productive systems (free enterprise, 'socialism' or 'communism'), the nature of government (the state versus the individual), to the destiny of man (can mankind survive?), these are no longer 'theory' but are in the market place, tied together so that they cannot be separated, matters on which the daily lives of millions upon millions depend." (The Invading Socialist Society, p. 14)

Never were such universal questions asked by the whole of the civilized world. Never have such inadequate answers been given. All that the bourgeoisie can answer is the purely technical question of the manufacture of atomic energy, and it wishes now that it could not answer this question.

Now it is precisely because the contradiction in society has reached its farthest point in Stalinist Russia that the dialectical materialist analysis of Russia is the most important key to the perspectives of world civilization.

The Law of Contradiction in Life

The second law of dialectical materialism is the change of quantity into quality. At a certain stage a developing contradiction, so to speak, explodes, and both the elements of the contradiction are thereby altered. In the history of society these explosions are known as revolution. All the economic, social and political tendencies of the age find a point of completion which becomes the starting-point of new tendencies. The Russian Revolution is one such explosion.

Let us examine the Russian Revolution in some of its most important features, such as would be agreed upon by most observers, excepting the die-hard reactionaries.

The Revolution was the greatest outburst of social energy and creativity that we have yet seen. Previously, the French Revolution had astonished mankind by the grandeur of its achievements. So much so that to this day July 14, 1789 is the date in all probability most widely known among the great majority of mankind. But the Russian Revolution exceeded the French. A combination of workers and peasants, the lowest classes of mankind, tore up an established government by the roots and accomplished the greatest social overturn in history. Starting from nothing, they created a new state, created an army of millions, defended the new regime against famine, blockade and wars of intervention on all fronts. They reorganized the economy. They made Russia a modern state. They passed and tried honestly to carry out a series of laws on popular education, equality of women, repudiation of religious superstition, sexual sanity, workers control of production, all of which constituted the greatest potential democracy and enlightenment that the world had ever seen. They organized a world-wide Communist International devoted to the achievement of the same ideals in the entire world. The gradual



decline and final failure are treated in the text. But the accomplishments are imperishable and of permanent significance for mankind. Taken in its entirety, the heroic period of the Russian Revolution is the most glorious episode in human history.

Lenin, the leader of the revolution, claimed always that one of the greatest achievements was the establishment of a new type of democracy, the Soviets of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants Deputies which was able to unloose the creative energies of the great masses of the people. Their mere administration of the state, in his opinion, would make the further existence of capitalism impossible. This administration by the masses is

"not yet socialism, but it is no longer capitalism. It is a tremendous step towards socialism, a step from which, if complete democracy is retained, no backward step towards capitalism would be possible without the most atrocious violence perpetrated upon the masses." (The Threatening Catastrophe)

Capital, in the form of state-capital, once more rules in Russia. Democracy has not been retained. But this has been done only at the cost of the condition foreseen by Lenin. The most atrocious violence has been perpetrated upon the masses of the people. The Russian Revolution, as it has developed and declined, shows us the two most violent extremes that we have known in history. It is only dialectical materialism that can unite these extremes in logical and intelligible connection. It is the creative power, the democratic desires, the expansion of human personality, the record of achievement that was the Russian Revolution, it is these which have called forth the violence, the atrocities, the state organized as Murder Incorporated. Only such violence could have repressed such democracy.

One can see the glint in the eye of the enemy of the proletarian revolution. Himself without perspective, intellectually helpless before the contemporary barbarism, indulging in nonsensical opposites like Yogie and Commissars, or searching diligently in his own writhing insides for the solution to the problems of the world, he hastens to use the fact of the Russian degeneration as an unanswerable argument against the ideas of Bolshevism. Patience, my friend, patience. "Bolshevism," says Trotsky, "is above all a philosophy of history and a political conception." Without the philosophy, the political conception falls to the ground. We have to get to the philosophy step by step; we have arrived at this much. The atrocious violence and crimes which now distinguish the state of Stalin are the necessary and inevitable response to the revolutionary fervor and democratic organization and social desires of the Russian people. Not the Russian people in general, however, but the Russian people as they had developed and expressed themselves in the socialist revolution of 1917. But this is not merely a Russian phenomenon. The Russian Revolution is a climax to a series of revolutions which have moved according to certain laws. The British Revolution in the seventeenth century embraced only small sections of the population - some revolutionary bourgeois, petty-bourgeois farmers and yeoman and a small number of artisans and others in the few and small towns. They could not create the new but they could destroy the old. The work of the revolution having been accomplished, the counter-revolution, heir to the new social order, established itself by a mere invitation to Charles I to return. A handful of people only were punished. With the development of economy and its socialization, i.e. the increasing inter-relation of all classes in production, the French Revolution embraces the great mass of the nation. The revolution destroys feudalism and establishes the modern state. Its basic work accomplished, "order" must be restored to society by the counter-revolution, the heirs to the new regime. But this time there are millions of aroused people. It is the great body of the nation which is to be disciplined. No mild return of royalty, no forgiveness, no mutual amnesty. Only the military police dictatorship of Napoleon can hold the country down. The contradiction between the revolution and the counter-revolution has sharpened.

Society established itself on new foundations. But the contradiction between the classes grows. If the revolution in Russia was the broadest and deepest development of the revolution of the seventeenth century, the Stalinist regime is the similar development of the counter-revolution. An historical analogy will illuminate the concrete case. The German revolution of 1918 did not overthrow bourgeois society. But the German proletariat, larger and more highly developed than the Russian, had a long history of democratic achievement, and organization behind it. After the revolution, its organization continued and expanded. That is why the Nazi counter-revolution was as brutal as it was. But if the German proletariat in 1918 had established a soviet state embracing workers, agricultural proletarians and semi-proletarians, the lower ranks of the petty-bourgeoisie and the sympathetic intelligentsia, then logically speaking, one of two things would have happened. Either the new democratic formation would have gone on from strength to strength, awakening the deepest reserves of social power and aspirations of the already highly developed German people, and spreading throughout Europe. Either this or something else. The atrocities and the violence which would have been needed to suppress a successful German proletarian revolution (and the response it would have awakened in the German and other European peoples) would have exceeded the crimes of Hitler as much as Hitler exceeded the crimes of Napoleon.

The pervading barbarism of the Stalinist regime, therefore, is not to be attributed to this or that weakness in the theory of "Communism" or some partial aspect of the Stalinist state. Stage by stage, we have seen the revolution and the counter-revolution develop in Europe over the centuries. At each new stage of development, both the revolution and the counter-revolution assume a new quality with the new quality of the social development. Precisely because the Russian Revolution assumed a new quality in attempting to establish a universal democracy, the Russian counter-revolution assumes a new quality of universal barbarism in the sense that it embraces all aspects of the Russian state.

At this stage, to try to separate progressive aspects from so comprehensive and all-pervading an enemy of human development as is the Stalinist state is to strike down the dialectical method at the root. Hegel understood the limits within which one could designate a corruption as partial.

"The Reformation resulted from the corruption of the Church. That corruption was not an accidental phenomenon; it is not the mere abuse of power and dominion. A corrupt state of things is very frequently represented as an 'abuse'; it is taken for granted that the foundation was good - the system, the institution itself faultless - but that the passion, the subjective interest, in short, the arbitrary volition of men has made use of that which in itself was good to further its own selfish ends, and that all that is required to be done is to remove these adventitious elements. On this showing the institute in question escapes obloquy, and the evil that disfigures it appears something foreign to it. But when accidental abuse of a good thing really occurs, it is limited to particularity. A great and general corruption affecting a body of such large and comprehensive scope as a Church, is quite another thing. The corruption of the Church was a native growth." (Philosophy of History)

It is a salutary warning. The Russian Revolution failed because of its isolation. But every day adds to the impossibility of maintaining that the corruption of Stalinist society is not "a native growth" but merely an "abuse." The Russian Revolution is the completion of a historical process, the development of class society. Its relation to past revolutions can be illuminated by the dialectical laws of changes of quantity into quality. The British Revolution, although it pointed the road for the rest of Europe, was only to a subordinate degree of international significance. The French Revolution shook the whole of Europe to its foundations and established the logical lines along which revolution and counter-revolution would struggle in Europe for the succeeding century.

It is in the very nature of modern society and the Russian Revolution, that Russia today is symbolical of the whole fate of modern civilization. There is no further stage. Either the revolution succeeds in encompassing the whole of the world or the whole of the world collapses in counter-revolution and barbarism. The whole path of Western civilization for two thousand years has reached an ultimate stage. There is no bypath. There is no third alternative.

Therefore, as dialectical materialists, we do not bewail nor do we underestimate or in any way attempt to minimize the monstrous character of the Stalinist regime. We repudiate utterly any idea that what is there has any socialist character whatever. But we draw from it for Russia itself and for the whole world an ultimate, a universal conclusion. The barbarism is not to come. It is there. In our previously quoted pamphlet, we have written:

"The unending murders, the destruction of peoples, the bestial passions, the sadism, the cruelties and the lusts, all the manifestations of barbarism of the last thirty years are unparalleled in history. But this barbarism exists only because nothing else can suppress the readiness for sacrifice, the democratic instincts and creative power of the great masses of the people."

In its very degradation the Russian Revolution has become the symbol of the crisis of world civilization.

#### The Inevitability of Socialism

Socialism and barbarism are the two forces in conflict. The philosophy of history which is Bolshevism bases itself upon the destruction of the barbarism by the inevitable triumph of the socialist revolution. There are even revolutionaries who deny this. For them, it is not scientific to believe in inevitability. Such a belief implies that dialectic is a religion or mysticism. For them the correct scientific attitude is to reserve judgment. Yet these very ones turn out to be the mystics and the practitioners of an ill-concealed religiosity. If, as they say, they recognize the bankruptcy of bourgeois democracy, if they accept the need for universality in the masses, if they recognize that barbarism is the only force that can suppress this need, then to refuse to accept the inevitability of socialism leaves only one of two choices. Either they accept the inevitability of barbarism, that is to say, the acceptance of the principle of inevitability which they have just rejected; or they are left with the hope, the faith, the belief that history will offer some way out of the impasse. This is the denial of a philosophy of history, that is to say, the denial of a method of thought, for which the only name is irrationalism or mysticism. As Engels said in the Dialectic of Nature, call this by whatever name you like, it is God.

The deniers of the inevitability of socialism can be routed both historically and logically. First of all, historically, i.e., the history of Marxism itself. Marx developed his philosophical doctrines in the years which preceded the 1848 revolutions. In the early forties the revolution was obviously on the way. Yet society was dominated by the experience of the great French Revolution which had achieved such miracles but had failed to achieve universality. (liberty, equality and fraternity) and despite all its sacrifices and bloodshed, had ended in the triumph of the counter-revolution. The experience of 1830 had only multiplied both the fears and the hopes which had been engendered by the colossal experience of the French Revolution. In this period, so similar to ours, philosophy came out of the study, particularly in Germany; and attempted to give some answers to the problems that were shaking society.

82 The Utopian socialists of all stripes were distinguished precisely by this, that they argued interminably about the possibility as opposed to the inevitability of the socialist revolution. They were tortured by these doubts because, after



the experience of the French Revolution and its obvious failure to relieve the conditions of the great masses of the people, they themselves had lost faith in the inevitability of socialism. Which is only another way of saying the inevitability of the achievement by the people of complete self-expression, complete democracy, socialism. Insofar as their beliefs were the result of theoretical speculation, they had, in the words of Marx, lost the capacity to draw from the experience of man's past in order to establish perspectives for man's future.

The result was complete chaos, in their own thoughts and an absolute inability to meet the challenge of the approaching revolution. It was into this ulcer that Marx drove the knife of scientific socialism. It was scientific because it moved according to certain laws. Bolshevism is a philosophy of history. Marx first clarified himself philosophically. As he wrote to Ruge in 1843:

"Almost greater than the outer obstacles appear the inner difficulties. For although there is no doubt about the 'whence,' there prevails the more confusion about the 'whither.' Not only has a general anarchy broken out among the reformers; each of them also must himself confess that he has no exact conception of what ought to be. Precisely in this is the advantage of the new movement that we do not anticipate the new world dogmatically but intend to find the new in the criticism of the old world. Up to now the philosophers have had the solution of all riddles lying in their desks and the dumb exterior world had only to gape in order for the ready-baked pies of wisdom to fly into their mouths. Philosophy has become worldly, and the most decisive proof of this is that philosophic consciousness has been drawn into the anguish of the struggle not only superficially but thoroughly. If the construction of the future and the preparation for all time is not our affair, it is all the more certain what we have to complete at present, i.e., the most relentless criticism of all existing things, relentless both in the sense that the criticism fears no results and even less fears conflicts with the existing powers."

That is the method, the future being seen as contained in and arising out of the present. We face the same situation today in the radical and revolutionary movement. In 1947, however, not only is philosophy worldly. The world is driven to become philosophical. It is compelled to examine in their nature and in the totality of their relations, (that is to say, philosophically) economics, politics, science and even the very nature of the universe and society. All agitation about the possibility of barbarism, third alternatives, the mysticism of the inevitability of socialism, these are no more than what they were in Marx's day, only infinitely more so: terror before the destructive antagonisms of modern society, doubts of the capacity of the proletariat to resolve them. This amounts to no more than a defense of bourgeois society insofar as bourgeois society still can provide thinkers with freedom enough to substitute the analysis of their own thoughts for a positive intervention in the chaos of society.

So far historically. Logically, the inevitability of socialism is the absolute reverse of religion or mysticism. It is a consciously constructed necessity of thought. As we have quoted in the article on Historical Retrogression, Hegel recognized that without holding fast in thought to your ultimate goal, it is impossible to think properly.

"To hold fast the positive in its negative, and the content of the presupposition in the result, is the most important part of rational cognition: only the simplest reflection is needed to furnish conviction of the absolute truth and necessity of this requirement, while with regard to the examples of proofs, the whole of Logic consists of these." (Logic, Vol. II, p. 476)

Precisely because they held fast to the presupposition of the inevitability of bourgeois society, the bourgeois thinkers in the early days of capitalism made their tremendous contribution to the science of human thought. Even without

philosophical perspective, the bourgeoisie at least has one reality, maintenance of power against the workers and rival bourgeoisies. But without presupposing the inevitability of socialism, that is to say, without thinking always in terms of the victory of the masses, thought among those hostile to bourgeois society must become a form of scholasticism and gnosticism, self-agitation and caprice.

Over a hundred years ago, Hegel said that the simplest reflection will show the necessity of holding fast the positive in its negative, the presupposition in the result, the affirmation that is contained in every negation, the future that is in the present. It is one of the signs of the advanced stage of human development that this is no longer a mere philosophical but a concrete question. To anyone who does not accept bourgeois society, the simplest reflection shows that it is impossible not only to think but to take any kind of sustained positive action in the world today unless one postulates the complete victory of the great masses of the people. What is this but the exemplification in life of the logical theory, the inevitability of socialism?

## II. THE NEGATION OF THE NEGATION

### The Truth is the Whole.

The Stalinist state, the Nazi state, and in their varying degrees all states today, based upon property and privilege, are the negation of the complete democracy of the people. It is this state which is to be destroyed, that is to say, it is this state which is to be negated by the proletarian revolution. Thus, the inevitability of socialism is the inevitability of the negation of the negation, the third and most important law of the dialectic.

I have said earlier that the laws of dialectic are "hypotheses." Any Deweyite pragmatist who is rubbing his hands with joy at this "reasonable" Marxism is in for rude disillusionment. "Dialectics," said Lenin, "is the theory of knowledge of (Hegel and) Marxism." So far I have been dealing with it as a theory of knowledge, as a mode of thought, examining more or less empirically contemporary society and the Russian Revolution, and showing how by means of the dialectical approach, some order, some perspective, some understanding come out of them, showing equally why the bourgeoisie can make no sense of anything except to hold on to power.

But Marx's fundamental hypotheses were not hypotheses in general. They were not *ad hoc* generalizations, empirically arrived at, tentatively used, discarded if not satisfactory, experimental or instrumentalist. They were logical abstractions, organized according to the method of Hegel and reflecting the movement of human society. This is no simple matter. But it has remained obscured and neglected too long.

The dialectic is a theory of knowledge, but precisely for that reason, it is a theory of the nature of man. Hegel and Marxism did not first arrive at a theory of knowledge which they applied to nature and society. They arrived at a theory of knowledge from their examination of men in society. Their first question was: What is man, what is the truth about him, where has he come from and where is he going? They answered that question first because they knew that without any answer to that general question, they could not think about particular questions.

Both Hegel and Marx in their different ways believed that man is destined for freedom and happiness. They did not wish this (or they did, that does not matter). They came to this conclusion by examining man's history as a totality. Man for Marx was not Christian man nor the man of the French Revolution (nor Stalin's blood-stained secret police). The concept of man was a constantly developing idea which was headed for some sort of completeness. When Marx said:

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that with the achievement of the socialist revolution, the "real history of humanity will begin", he was not being rhetorical or inspiring (or optimistic). He was being strictly and soberly scientific.

"The truth is the whole. The whole, however, is merely the essential nature reaching its completeness through the process of its own development. If the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a result, that only at the end is it what it is in very truth."

Thus Hegel in the Phenomenology of Mind (p. 82). Marx worked on the same principles. The essential nature of man was becoming clear only as it approached its completeness in bourgeois society. It is in bourgeois society that we could see what man really is. And it is "only at the end" of bourgeois society that we can see what man is in very truth. Thus it is in the dialectical analysis of the contemporary barbarism that can be seen most clearly what is the "real" nature of man. It is this which explains his past. It could be expressed within the concrete circumstances of past ages only to the degree that objective circumstances allowed. Did man, therefore, suffer through all those centuries to produce completed man? What injustice! The defenders of bourgeois society are ready to rage over all these unjustified sufferings of past mankind in their opposition to the revolution which will relieve present mankind. They will get nothing to comfort themselves with. "The truth is the whole." All the various stages constitute the nature of man. Continues Hegel: "And just in that consists its nature, which is to be actual, subject, or self-becoming, self-development." Man is the subject, that which is developing itself. The subject becomes more and more real, and therefore truth about man becomes deeper and wider, more universal, more complex, more concrete. Complete universality, complete democracy in the sense that every man is able to do more or less what every other man does, this is the ultimate stage. The Russian Revolution was an imperfect, limited, handicapped but nevertheless decisive step in this direction. The nature of man, therefore, becomes the search for this completeness and the overcoming of the obstacles which stood and stand in its way. Past history becomes intelligible and what is more important, the road to the solution of the overwhelming problems to the present day becomes open.

If today we say that now we know what is the "real" man, it is because we see him as a totality, as the result of his whole past. But from there we make another step. The terrible crisis of civilization is the result of the fact that man is at last real, he has become himself, completely developed. But the old type of world which developed him cannot contain him. He must burst through it. That world was a world in which he was subjected to nature. It was in the subjection of nature that he fully realized himself, a continuous negation of the obstacles which impeded his development. That being accomplished, his real history will begin. He negates all that has previously impeded him, i.e. negated him, in the full realization of his inherent nature. Socialism is the negation of all previous negations. It is obvious that these are large conceptions. But the death of a world-civilization is not a small thing.

#### The Abstract Universal

The conception being stated, it is now necessary not to prove it (only life can do that) but to show where it came from.

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Western civilization, and therefore the Hegelian dialectic begins with Christianity." It was Christianity which established universality in its most abstract form, that very universality which we are now seeing concretely striving for expression in the proletariat all over the contemporary world. The very early or "primitive" Christians attempted a universality that was extremely concrete, commonality of gods and absolute equality. But it soon collapsed. The abstract universality was established by that historical Christianity which superseded the Roman Empire. Christianity united all men; before birth, in the universality of original sin, and after death, in the possibility of universal redemption in heaven. Thus it carefully avoided a concrete universality. It was the religion of the millions who had been released from slavery by the collapse of the Roman Empire. The narrow straitened circumstances of their material lives were compensated for by the subjective conception of an after-life in which all their material needs would be satisfied, or better still, there would be no need for material satisfactions at all. But, extreme abstraction though it was, man is for the first time established as universal man. Hegel expresses this idea in all its fulness in the Philosophy of History.

"Man, finite when regarded for himself, is yet at the same time the Image of God and a fountain of infinity in himself. He is the object of his own existence - has in himself an infinite value, an external destiny. Consequently, he has his true home in a supersensuous world - an infinite subjectivity, gained only by a rupture with mere natural existence and volition, and by his labor to break their power from within."

"These conditions are not yet a concrete order, but simply the first abstract principles, which are won by the instrumentality of the Christian Religion for the secular State. First, under Christianity Slavery is impossible; for man is man in the abstract essence of his nature - is contemplated in God; each unit of mankind is an object of the grace of God and of the Divine purpose; 'God will have all men to be saved.' Utterly excluding all speciality, therefore, man, in and for himself - in his simple quality of man - has infinite value; and this infinite value abolished, ipso facto, all particularity attaching to birth or country."

That men should think of themselves in this way was a tremendous revolution. It was that beginning which Hegel calls an abstract universal. The history of humanity is no more than this abstract universal becoming concrete. International socialism is the concrete embodiment of the abstract principle of Christianity. And Christianity appeared and international socialism is now appearing because they are of the very nature of man. To call the recognition of this teleology and religion is a sign of the greatest ignorance, or if not ignorance, a determination at all costs to defend bourgeois society against the philosophy of Bolshevism today so as not to have to defend it against the revolutionary masses tomorrow. To have been Christian and to be socialist is an expression of the need for concrete universality which is not so much in as of the very nature of man. Dialectic bases itself upon this precisely because it is not religious and not teleological. If

\*Dialectic as a mode of thought had its origin among the Greek philosophers. In fact, the more one penetrates into dialectics, the more one is astonished at the colossal impudence and ignorance which passes for exposure of it. Lenin was very conscious of its historic significance. As he wrote in 1915: "The division of the one and the cognition of its contradictory parts (see the quotation from Philo on Heraclitus) at the beginning of Part III, 'Knowledge', in Lassalle's book on Heraclitus is the essence (one of the 'essentials', one of the principal, if not the principal characteristic or feature) of dialectics. This is precisely how Hegel puts the matter (Aristotle in his Metaphysics continually grapples with it and combats Heraclitus and Heraclitean ideas)." But although Hegel learnt more about dialectic from Aristotle than from any other single philosopher, he himself accepts Christianity as the starting point of our civilization.

this, scientifically speaking, is not the nature of man, then what do the opponents of dialectic offer instead? Either man has expressed these desires and these aims by accident, i.e., they have no significance whatever, for he might have expressed entirely different aims and had entirely different needs, and may do so tomorrow. Or these needs and aims are not the nature of man but came from some outside agency: under whatever name you like, this is God.

It is only in the sense described above that dialectic speaks of freedom and happiness being the purpose of man's existence. Purpose, not in the religious sense, but in the sense that if we examine man's history through the centuries, we observe that he has sought these aims. It is difficult therefore to say what other purpose his existence has, and the anti-dialectician is left with the alternative that man's life has no purpose at all, which is only another way of accommodating one's self to the existing society, bourgeois society.

The logical principle of universality contains within it a logical contradiction, the contradiction of abstract and concrete. This logical contradiction is a direct reflection of the objective circumstances in which the men of early Christianity lived. Their physical and material circumstances were on the lowest possible level. And therefore, to make their existence a totality, they had to fill it out with this tremendous abstraction. Thus is established the basic logical contradiction in the universal between concrete and abstract, between objective and subjective, between real and ideal, between content and form. But together both form a whole and have no meaning apart from each other. They are opposites but interpenetrated. To Christian man, the conception of heaven was real and necessary, an integral part of his existence in the objective world. Those who accuse dialectics of being a religion understand neither dialectics nor religion.

#### The Dialectic of Negativity

The history of man is his effort to make the abstract universal concrete. He constantly seeks to destroy, to move aside, that is to say, to negate what impedes his movement toward freedom and happiness. Man is the subject of history. "(The) subject, (man) is pure and simple negativity." This is a cardinal principle of the dialectical movement. The process is molecular, day by day, never resting, continuous. But at a certain stage, the continuity is interrupted. The molecular changes achieve a universality and explode into a new quality, a revolutionary change.

Previous to the revolutionary explosion, the aims of the struggle can be posed in partial terms, possibility. It is the impossibility of continuing to do this that interrupts the continuity.\*

The revolution, precisely because it is a revolution, demands all things for all men. It is an attempt to leap from the realm of objective necessity to the realm of objective freedom.

But in the limited objective circumstances to which the low level of productivity has confined society, what is demanded by, of and for all men, only some men can have. The concrete universality, therefore, becomes the property

\* As Trotsky explained in a conversation with Shachtman (The New Internationalist, August, 1941), "The whole thing is there in Hegel's Logic... When the quantity of the conditioning circumstances reaches a certain point,

when all the conditions of the revolution are at hand - and they are all created by capitalism itself - these conditions become qualitatively different. From making the revolution possible, they make it necessary. The revolution is inevitable."



of some men, a class. They are therefore compelled to use objective violence against those excluded and to substitute an abstract universality for the concrete universality of which the mass has been deprived. But the absence of concrete universality therefore begins to be limited and its limitations substituted for by abstractions. This is the Hegelian process of "mediation." The new state established after the revolution, the ideology which accompanies it, are a form of mediation between abstract and concrete, ideal and real, etc.

The mediation usually assumes the form of the state-power, and the specific ideological combinations of abstract and concrete to bind the new relations are developed by the philosophy of the age. A new equilibrium in the process of the development of man has been established. At a later stage, the same developing process will be repeated in the attempt to negate the actual stage of man previously established. There will be the mass revolution for undifferentiated universality, the class differentiation in its realization the splitting of the nation into opposing factors, and the attempt to realize in ideology the reconciliation of the opposing factors. Man is not only what he does but what he thinks and what he aims at. But this can only be judged by the concrete, what actually takes place. The truth is always concrete. But this concrete must always be viewed in the light of the whole, past, present and future. This is the essence of the dialectic.

In the decisive page of the preface to the Phenomenology, Hegel writes:

"As subject it is pure and simple negativity, and just on that account a process of splitting up what is simple and undifferentiated, a process of duplicating and setting factors in opposition, which (process) in turn is the negation of this indifferent diversity and of the opposition of factors it entails...It is the process of its own becoming, the circle which presupposes its end as its purpose, and has its end for its beginning; it becomes concrete and actual only by being carried out, and by the end it involves." (pp. 80-81)

Marx is expressing concretely just this concentrated Hegelian generalization when he says, in The German Ideology:

"For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, put in an ideal form; it will give its ideas the form of universality and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones. The class making a revolution appears from the very start, merely because it is opposed to a class, not as a class but as the representative of the whole society; it appears as the whole mass of society confronting the one ruling class. It can do this because, to start with, its interest really is more connected with the common interest of all other non-ruling classes, because under the pressure of conditions its interest has not yet been able to develop as the particular interest of a particular class. Its victory, therefore, benefits also many individuals of other classes which are not winning a dominant position, but only in so far as it now puts these individuals in a position to raise themselves into the ruling class...Every new class, therefore, achieves its hegemony only on a broader basis than that of the class ruling previously, in return for which the opposition of the non-ruling class against the new ruling class later develops all the more sharply and profoundly. Both these things determine the fact that the struggle to be waged against this new ruling class, in its turn, aims at a more decided and radical negation of the previous conditions of society than could all previous classes which sought to rule."

This organization of historical development did not fall from the sky. It is the result of the concept of the dialectic worked out by Hegel, the Hegel that Burnham calls the "arch-muddler" of human thought. Without the dialectic it could not be done at all. It is from the examination of the developing conflicts between abstract and concrete, subjective and objective, the abstract universal assuming a certain content which becomes concentrated in a special form, the form gradually becoming infused with a new content until it can contain it no longer and explodes; it is from the examination of all this in society and nature but particularly in its ideological reflection in philosophy that Hegel worked out the significance and interconnection of categories and the movement of his *Logic*. Just as Marx's economic categories are in reality social categories, just in the same way the logical categories, contradictions, etc. of Hegel are in reality social categories, and social movement. Hegel, and for very good reasons of his time, led his *Logic* into an impossible and fantastic idealism about world-spirit, etc. But the basis of his work was solidly materialistic. He himself repeatedly explains this in the clearest possible way.

"The community of principle which really links together individuals of the same class, and in virtue of which they are similarly related to other existences, assumes a form in human consciousness; and that form is the thought or idea which summarily comprehends the constituents of generic character...Every 'universal' in thought has a corresponding generic principle in Reality, to which it gives intellectual expression or form."  
(*The Philosophy of History*, p. 417, footnote)

Marx and Engels knew this. They could carry over the Hegelian dialectic into a materialistic form because it had been derived originally not from religion but from a study of the stages of man in nature and society and the reflection of these stages in human thought. The dialectic of negativity, the negation of the negation, the inevitability of socialism are a culmination in logical thought of social processes that have now culminated in contemporary society. You look in vain in the writings of Hook, Professor of Philosophy at New York University and Burnham, a member of the same faculty, for the slightest understanding of this.

### III. CLASS AND MASS

#### The Principle of Mediation

The beginning of this process for the modern world is Christianity and the beginning "presupposes its end as its purpose." Hegel, for reasons which we shall make plain, conceived the various stages to be the work of the universal spirit. Marx here is his diametrical opposite. Marx is a dialectical materialist. For him, and right from the very start, these concrete revolutionary stages are the work of the great masses of the people, forever seeking the concretization of universality as the development of the productive forces creates the objective circumstances and the subjective desires which move them.

Hegel could see the abstract universal, the relation between abstract and concrete in historical Christianity and the developing relation in human history. Marx saw that, but because he was closer to the end, he could see more of the "real" man. Because he had seen the revolutionary proletariat, he was able to complete the dialectical analysis of previous stages by the recognition of the role of the revolutionary masses. These appear at the very beginning of history.

In his introduction to the *Class Struggles in France*, Engels writes:

"This party of revolt, of those known by the name of Christian, was also strongly represented in the army; whole legions were Christian. When they

were ordered to attend the sacrificial ceremonies of the pagan established church, in order to do the honours there, the rebel soldiers had the audacity to stick peculiar emblems, crosses, on their helmets in protest. Even the wonted barrack cruelties of their superior officers were fruitless. The Emperor Diocletian could no longer quietly look on while order, obedience and discipline in his army were being undermined. He intervened energetically, while there was still time. He passed an anti-Socialist, I should say, anti-Christian law. The meetings of the rebels were forbidden, their meeting halls were closed or even pulled down, the Christian badges, crosses, etc. were, like the red handkerchiefs in Saxony, prohibited. Christians were declared incapable of holding offices in the state, they were not to be allowed even to become corporals. Since there was not available at that time judges so well-trained in respect of persons as Herr von Köller's anti-revolt bill assumes, the Christians were forbidden out of hand to seek justice before a court. This exceptional law was also without effect. The Christians tore it down from the walls with scorn; they are even supposed to have burnt the Emperor's palace in Nicomedia over his head. Then the latter revenged himself by the great persecution of Christians in the year 303, according to our chronology. It was the last of its kind. And it was so effective that seventeen years later the army consisted overwhelmingly of Christians, and the succeeding autocrat of the whole Roman Empire, Constantine, called the Great by the priests, proclaimed Christianity as the state religion." (Marr, Selected Works, Vol. II, pp. 191-192).

It was thus that historical Christianity came into being. The Christian revolutionaries, however, were not struggling to establish the Medieval Papacy. The Medieval Papacy was a mediation to which the ruling forces of society fellied in order to strangle the quest for universality of the Christian masses; in one sense the Papacy merely continued the Roman Imperium, and, in Hobbes' phrase, was indeed "no other than the ghost of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof."

But it was much more than that. Primitive Christianity had begun as a mass revolt that had sought to establish the community of man upon earth. By the time of Gregory the Great, when the Papacy began to take over the functions of the declined and fallen Roman Empire, the Papacy was beginning its career as the successor of the Emperors, mediated by the tremendous impact of the mass revolution. It was the ghost of the Roman Empire and living symbol of Christ on Earth. Heaven was too abstract to satisfy completely the masses of the people. The Church guaranteed them, in return for obedience, the happy future life. But it also took care of the life on earth and performed the functions of teacher, protector, and provider for the poor and sick and needy. It mediated between society and heaven and between the secular rulers of society and the masses. It succored the poor and was a center of learning, agriculture and industry. The Church mediation disguised itself as faith, hope and charity, and the greatest of these was charity. The feudal lords produced their mediation of honor and loyalty, of which loyalty was much the more important. In the method by which it was established, in its content and in its form, in its mediation of contending classes and its manipulation of concrete and abstract, subjective and objective, real and ideal, the Medieval Papacy, as the culmination of the Christian revolution, contains in embryo all the development to the modern age.

#### The Motive Force of History

The dialectical materialist method is the product of a stage nearer to the end. It is qualitatively different and therefore infinitely superior to Hegel's dialectic. Constantly, contemporary events throw a penetrating light into the past and thereby illuminate the future. It is, for example, the concrete history of the last thirty years of proletarian revolutions that for the first time makes it possible to grasp fully the meaning of the Renaissance. But the dialectical materialist study of the Renaissance drives the last nail in the coffin

of those who hesitate before the conceptions of the negation of the negation, the inevitability of socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no finer example of the dialectical method, as a continuous movement from the past to the present, from the developing present back to the past, and then through the very concreteness of the present, illuminating the future. The truth is the whole.

The leading ideological characteristic of the early Renaissance can be usefully designated by the popular term "Humanism." The medieval towns produced a brilliant civilization. With the growth of wealth, chiefly a result of commercial capitalism, there arise classes of men for whom the early Christian contradiction between objective and subjective, abstract and concrete, is no longer tenable. It is not merely a question of objective wealth. The idea of universality becomes more concrete because of the "energetic position which man is sensible of occupying in his subjective power over outward and material things in the natural world, in which he feels himself free and so gains for himself an absolute right." (Hegel *Philosophy of History*, p. 414)

The Papacy is itself mediated. It became humanized, i.e., more completely secular, and thus took the road to its own ruin. St. Thomas Aquinas had already begun the rationalization of faith, making it reasonable by a brilliant and profound misuse of the writings of Aristotle. Dante, whom Engels calls one of the first modern men, though profoundly religious, for secular reasons wished to substitute Emperor for Pope. The national monarchy begins to substitute for the papal authority.

So far so good. But, and here the Marxist dialectic sharply departs from the Hegelian, the new universal was established and took its form by such violent revolutions of the European proletariat as Europe did not see again until the period which opened in 1917. It is only recently that bourgeois historians have begun to recognize these. The historians of the socialist society will in time make of this one of the great chapters of human history.

As always in critical periods, there were a series of peasant revolutions in Europe throughout the fourteenth century. They were of tremendous range and power, some of them semi-socialistic. But they were not decisive. The decisive revolutions were revolutions of the workers and the petty-bourgeoisie of the towns. If the phrase had not already been appropriated by Marxists for the revolution of the socialist proletariat, it would be perfectly correct to say that within the various municipalities, the workers aimed at, consciously, and in some few cases actually achieved, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In the last half of the fourteenth century, these revolutions swept from one end of Europe to another. In Salonika, the sailors and the artisans ruled the rich, the landowners, the commercial magnates and the clergy for ten years. In Italy, the struggle was between the "fat" and the "thin." In Bologna, in Genoa, in Sienna, the masses sought to obtain absolute mastery of municipal power. In Florence under the leadership of Michel Lando, they organized the celebrated revolt of the Ciompi and established the dictatorship of the proletariat. They called the workers "God's people." Rome and other towns saw similar battles. But it was in the Lowlands, in the towns of Ghent, Ypres, and Bruges that the workers made the most desperate efforts to establish their own dictatorship. Revolutionary history badly needs a Marxist study of the incidents which center around the van Artevelde family. Over and over again during a period of decades, the workers rose. More than once, they established their dictatorship, they proclaimed an equality of fortunes and the suppression of all authority except the authority of people who live by manual labor. They repeatedly defeated the flower of feudal chivalry. It is reported that in Ghent, the workers went so far as

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to plan the complete extermination of the bourgeoisie and the nobles with the exception of children of six years of age. In the German towns of Cologne, Strassburg, Aix-la-Chapelle, Lubeck, Stettin and many others; in Barcelona, Valencia and other towns of Spain, the same desperate battles took place. The working class and its allies closest to it fought for fifty years all over Europe to establish proletarian democracy. Why they failed to achieve substantial successes was due not only to the low level of production but the fact that they fought only as members of isolated municipalities. Some of them indeed aimed boldly at an international proletarian revolution. But their time was not yet.

This is not religion. It is history. Let Boissonade, a bourgeois historian, speak in the concluding paragraph of his Life and Work in Medieval Europe. The reader should read carefully and note particularly the words we have underlined.

"For the first time the masses, ceasing to be mere herds without rights or thoughts of their own, became associations of freemen, proud of their independence, conscious of the value and dignity of their labour, fitted by their intelligent activity to collaborate in all spheres, political, economic and social, in the tasks which the aristocrats believed themselves alone able to fulfill. Not only was the power of production multiplied a hundredfold by their efforts, but society was regenerated by the incessant influx of new and vigorous blood. Social selection was henceforth better assured. It was thanks to the devotion and spirit of these medieval masses that the nations became conscious of themselves, for it was they who brought about the triumph of national patriotism, just as their local patriotism had burned for town or village in the past. The martyrdom of a peasant girl from the marshes of Lorraine saved the first of the great nations, France, which had become the most brilliant home of civilization in the Middle Ages. They gave to the modern states their first armies, which were superior to those of feudal chivalry. Above all, it was they who prepared the advent of democracy and bequeathed to the laboring masses the instruments of their power, the principles of freedom and association. Labour, of old despised and depreciated, became a power of incomparable force in the world, and its social value became increasingly recognized. It is from the Middle Ages that this capital evolution takes its date, and it is this which makes this period, so often misunderstood, and so full of a confused but singularly powerful activity; the most important in the universal history of labour before the great changes witnessed by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."

This was the working class five hundred years ago. They were not proletarians in the modern sense. They were for the most part free workers in the guilds. They did not function within the socialized organization of modern labor. But note, Messrs. anti-dialecticians and anti-Marxists, that these workers, five hundred years ago, all over Europe, believed that they were "fitted by their intelligent activity to collaborate in all spheres, political, economic and social in the tasks which the aristocrats believed themselves alone able to fulfill." That is what the millions of proletarians all over the world today believe. Their ancestors of five hundred years ago were not as developed as the workers of today. But they fought for complete equality, for complete democracy, for universality. The whole of modern history shows that their descendants of today will have the same or society will go down in ruin. We believe that they will succeed. And you, what do you believe?

The medieval workers failed, but they established the foundations of what we know as liberalism. Some of the anti-dialecticians still live on it, thin as though it has become. The bourgeoisie and the feudal lords, in terror of these workers, rallied behind the absolute monarchy and the national state. Both humanism and the national state of the absolute monarchy were mediations of the mass proletarian desire for universality no longer in heaven but on earth. Humanism



was a mediation, the substitution of a liberal culture for the rich, in place of the complete self-expression desired by the workers. The national state, disciplining the church, supplemented the concrete objective protection of wealth by abstract subjective claims of being the arbiter of justice, the guardian of law and order, and the protector of all the people. The contradictions, the antagonisms in the quest for universality had grown sharper than ever.

So, Messrs. doubters and sceptics and sneerers at dialectic, you will begin to see perhaps that what dialecticians believe in is not the result of religion. We have a certain conception of the nature of man based on history. When Marx and Engels wrote about the proletarian revolution in connection with the negation of the negation, when they wrote that in the present stage of society, man would either achieve this revolution or society would tear itself to pieces, they were being guided not by the dislocations of Marx's "psyche", as Edmund Wilson thinks, or by any Hegelian triads or historical religiosity, as is the opinion of Burnham and Hook. It was a logical deduction from the experience of history. The struggle of the masses for universality did not begin yesterday. An intellectual like Dewey believes that man's quest is the quest for certainty. The intellectual believes that all men are intellectuals. That is wrong. Men seek not intellectual certainty. The quest is the mass quest for universality in action and in life. It is the motive force of history. And history has reached a climax because this quest has reached a climax.

#### Protestant Reformation and French Revolution

Space compels rapid compression of the next great stages in the process of social development - the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution. Rising capitalism expropriated the agricultural laborer, and in the creation of wage-labor threw the masses further back from concrete universality than they had ever been. For centuries Humanism had dragged universality from heaven down to earth and had by that made the contradiction between real and ideal an intolerable antagonism. The new proletariat could not play any great part in the struggles of the Protestant Reformation, as the mature workers of the medieval towns had done. Hence the classes which took the lead in the new struggles were the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie leading the peasants. Let us concentrate on one outstanding and familiar example, the English Revolution.

The Puritans give us the key to the understanding of the whole period in the light of the struggle for democracy. The revolution of Luther had shattered forever the claims of the Pope as mediator between God and man. It placed the responsibility for the individual's moral salvation squarely on the individual man. As Hegel put it: "This is the essence of the Reformation: Man is in his very nature destined to be free" and in his own peculiar but profound manner he sums up modern history. "Time, since that epoch, has had no other work to do than the formal imbuing of the world with this principle, in bringing the Reconciliation implicit (in Christianity) into objective and explicit realization." If you stand it on its head, and say that the objective development of man in society has been the various stages through which various classes have sought to realize the freedom implicit in Christianity, a great truth will have been grasped.

But the mass of men do not think, and certainly do not act according to those terms. The Puritans of town and country, petty-bourgeois, and semi-proletarian, shut off from freedom by the state, attempted to establish democracy in religion. The sects each attempted to form a social community in which the individual would exercise the new freedom, unlimited except by the equal freedom of other men. James I of England did not misunderstand them one bit. He discerned the republicanism hidden in their anti-Ecclesiasticism. To all their arguments for religious freedom he invariably croaked in reply, "No Bishop, no King." Their

weakness was a social weakness, the lack of organization which reflected the scattered character of their labor. But when the big bourgeoisie and some liberal aristocrats started the revolution, and the small farmers and small masters of the towns were organized in the army, the Puritans showed what social passions were hidden behind their psalm-singing. In 1646, tired of the vacillations of their bourgeois and aristocratic leaders, they seized the person of the King and held him as a hostage. They then began negotiations with Cromwell and in the twin documents, the Agreement of the People and the Heads of the Proposals, they put forward a program for parliamentary democracy such as was not even put forward in England until the Chartist movement two hundred years later. They put it forward to Cromwell; and in the discussion with Cromwell and his brother-in-law, Ireton, they raised the property question as a barrier to democracy in the most plain-spoken manner. These were not the Levellers, and the Diggers, who were the extreme left. These were the main body of the army. They were suppressed by a combination of fraud and force. But Cromwell, striking to the left, was compelled to strike at the right also. Charles I was executed and the monarchy was destroyed. In the familiar phrase, it was not monarchy but royalty which returned at the restoration. Monarchy in Britain was gone forever, destroyed by the religious democrats. They had held power for eleven years, but as always, and particularly in this case, they were too few to represent the nation and the old process of mediation once more took place. They had cleared the way for capitalism and nowhere was the antagonism sharper between developing capitalism and the masses of the nation than in England.

The history of the French Revolution is familiar to all Marxists and the conclusions for our main argument are therefore easy to draw.

The intervention of the masses, its range and power, the social desires, the capacity for achievement and sacrifice, revealed itself to an educated Europe which had not dreamt that the shabby exterior of workers and peasants and the common people hid such colossal energies and such social needs. The quest for universality was no longer a secret. Liberty, equality and fraternity were the actual slogans of the revolution. If the Reformation had sought to establish a "democratic" freedom of religion, the French Revolution attempted to establish a social freedom of political democracy. If out of the individual's responsibility for his own salvation, there had leapt democracy, out of his political freedom, there leapt communism. Robespierre's dictatorship was an attempt to establish the reign of virtue. But the French masses, not only Babeuf, saw and were ready for what was needed, drastic regulation and even confiscation of the property of the rich. The modern problem was posed. But it was the old problem in a new and more aggravated, a more contradictory form.

When the French Revolution was over and men had time to think, it was seen that the revolution of reason and the mighty struggle for liberty, equality and fraternity had left men farther apart than ever before. Behind the formal equality before the law, capitalist production was accumulating wealth at one pole and misery, subordination and degradation at the other on a scale hitherto unknown. The universality of men, faith, hope, charity, honor, loyalty, humanism, liberty, equality, fraternity, democracy, these were as abstract to the mass of men as the heaven of the early Popes. These ideals had a certain existence among the ruling classes, but thinking man could see that the needs and deprivations of the excluded mass reacted with devastating effect upon the humanity of the rulers. The masses had tried to make the state a popular state. The result had been the creation of a monster such as had never been seen before and far surpassed in range and power the state of the absolute monarchy. It was in the throes of this contradiction which was shaking all Europe that Hegel, the culmination of the German classical philosophers, set himself to study the problem of human destiny and elaborated a theory of knowledge.

Hegel recognized what men were striving for and he recognized that the French Revolution was a climax in this struggle. He knew and understood Adam Smith. He understood the fragmentation and dehumanization of man in the process of capitalist production. Some of Marx's most famous pages in Capital have as their direct origin some of Hegel's descriptions of the workers in capitalist industry. This was, for Hegel, the final insuperable barrier to any community of association among men. Universality for the mass of men was impossible.

#### IV. THE CULMINATION OF ABSTRACT UNIVERSALITY-

##### Marx vs. Hegel

We who live toward the end, in the epoch of Hitler and Stalin, can understand Hegel's conclusions better than most men of previous generations, with the exception of Marx. Concrete universality for the mass of men was impossible. It was a mighty decision to take! But Hegel did not flinch. Only the state, said Hegel, could embody universality for the community. But, in particular, the state was a defense against the revolutionary masses. Hegel had seen them and their activities in European history and now the French Revolution had shown that nothing could ever come of it. So it had been and it would ever be. At each stage therefore, a few chosen individuals represented the abstract spirit of mankind. Universality had to be restricted to these. This was the basis of Hegel's idealism. But with the clear insight of a great scholar of both past and contemporary history, and by his mastery of his method, he analyzed and drew his analysis to its conclusion. The state would have to organize production. The chaos of capitalist production would have to be disciplined by organizing the separate industries into corporations. The state would be the state of the corporations. Universality being impossible to all men, the state-bureaucracy would embody universality and represent the community. Hegel did not know the modern proletariat. He operated therefore on the basis of the inevitability of proletarian subordination. But grant him that premise and his dialectical method shows that he made an astonishing anticipation in thought of the inevitable end of bourgeois society - the totalitarian state. Hegel must not be misjudged. He was no reactionary and despite his corporate state, the Nazis hated him. He wrote and propounded in the name of freedom and Reason. But those who today sneer at him and his dialectic are not fit even to wipe the dust off his books. To this day, except for the writings of the great Marxists, no single writer since the French Revolution has so much to say that is indispensable to modern thought and particularly modern politics.\*

This is where Marx began. It was as impossible to go any farther along the road of Hegel as it is impossible to go farther than the totalitarian state of contemporary history. Beyond both lies only decay. Marx had to abandon the quest for universality or find a new basis for it.

A long line of European thinkers, Ricardo, Fourier, Saint-Simon, Feuerbach, and the classical economists, the ferment in Europe which preceded the revolutionary outburst of 1848, and, what Hegel had never seen, the emergence of the proletariat as an organized social force, these gave to Marx, already a master of Hegel's system, the impetus to the new system. Men were most obviously not abandoning universality. They had sought it in heaven, in the freedom of religion, in the freedom of politics. Politics had failed. Neither Hegel nor Marx ever had any illusions about bourgeois democracy as a solution to the unquenchable desires and aspirations of men.

\* A superbly edited and translated edition of The Philosophy of Right by Hegel has appeared in recent years. It is indispensable to serious students of Marxism. (by T.M. Knox, Oxford, 1942)

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Nothing is more indicative of the philosophical character of Marxism and its organic continuity of the tradition of the great philosophers of Europe than the method by which Marx dismissed democratic politics. For Marx, bourgeois democratic politics was a fraud, but like all the great panaceas from Christianity on, it was an expression of the perennial need, historically conditioned. The productive process of capitalism denied any real community to men. And democratic politics, like religion, was a form of mediation by which men gained the illusion that they were all members of one social community, an illusion of universality. How not to remember Hitler's insistence that his tyrannical regime represented the folk community. The more the Nazi regime deprived the masses of all human rights, the more imperative it was to substitute an abstraction of abstractions to create the totality of existence, a sense of universality, without which men cannot live.

Marx reversed Hegel at all points. It was not an individual intellectual construction. Men were doing it and had been doing it all around him for years.

Hegel saw objective history as the successive manifestation of a world-spirit. (Marx placed the objective movement in the process of production.) Hegel had been driven to see the perpetual quest for universality as necessarily confined to the process of knowledge. Marx reversed this and rooted the quest for universality in the need for the free and full development of all the inherent and acquired characteristics in productive and intellectual labor. Hegel had made the motive force of history the work of a few gifted individuals in whom was concentrated the social movement. Marx propounded the view that it was only when ideas seized hold of the masses that the process of history moved. Hegel dreaded the revolt of the modern mass. Marx made the modern proletarian revolution the motive force of modern history. Hegel placed the future guardianship of society in the hands of the bureaucracy. Marx saw future society as headed for ruin except under the rulership of the proletariat and the vanishing distinction between intellectual and manual labor.

That was the conflict. That is the conflict today. The proletariat, said Marx, is revolutionary or it is nothing. The proletariat, he said, will conquer or society will destroy itself. The bureaucracy as conceived by Hegel he subjected to a merciless analysis. Let the reader think of Hitlerite Germany and Stalinist Russia and what is developing in Britain, and he will see how profound, how realistic, how anticipatory of the absolute crisis was the battle between the last of the great bourgeois philosophers and the first philosopher of the proletarian revolution. The smug anti-dialecticians have not yet caught up with this conflict between the masters of dialectic ever a hundred years ago.

Marx, than whom no greater admirer of Hegel ever lived, pilloried the weakness of the master who had fathered him.

"Hegel's conception of history is nothing other than the speculative <sup>expression</sup> of the Christian-German dogma of the opposition of spirit and matter, God and the world. This opposition expresses itself within history, within the human world itself, as a few chosen individuals, active spirits, confronting the rest of humanity, the spiritless mass, matter. Hegel's conception of history presupposes an abstract or absolute spirit which develops itself so that humanity is only a mass bearing this spirit unconsciously or consciously. Within the empirical exoteric history, he sees a speculative esoteric history. The history of mankind is transformed into the history of the abstract spirit of mankind, beyond actual men.

841 "Parallel with this Hegelian doctrine, there was developed in France the theory of the doctrinaires proclaiming the sovereignty of reason in opposition to the sovereignty of the people, in order to exclude the masses and rule alone. The



result is that if the activity of the actual masses is nothing more than the activity of a mass of human individuals, the abstract universality, reason, spirit possesses abstract expression exhausted in a few individuals. It depends upon the position and the strength of imagination of each individual whether he will pass a representative of 'spirit!' (Marx, The Holy Family)

You do not want to accept the concept of the inevitability of socialism? Then, gentlemen, there is waiting for you the theory of the elite, the chosen few. Neither Marx nor Hegel played with these ideas which for them were social realities.

Hegel had observed the unconscious development of the process of mediation. The bureaucracy of his corporate-state was a conscious final mediation. Marx, in the Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right, took up the challenge. The passage which follows might have been strange or difficult twenty years ago, not today. The reader must remember that both Hegel and Marx had common presuppositions - the recognition of the quest for universality, the recognition that the French Revolution had brought the perpetual mediation of the growing contradictions to some final stage. The essence of the passage is that while Hegel believed that the bureaucracy can and must be a mediation for universality, Marx shows that the contradiction between objective and subjective, between ideal and real, concrete and abstract has now reached such a stage, that the universality of the bureaucracy can have no reality. The quest for universality, embodied in the masses, constituting the great mass of the nation, forbids any mediation. The bureaucracy is compelled to become objectively the embodiment of the crassest materialism and subjectively, in its words, the embodiment of the crassest hypocrisy.

Here is the passage with certain words emphasized.

"The 'state formalism' which the bureaucracy is, is the 'state as formalism' and as such formalism Hegel has described it. Since this 'state formalism' is constituted as actual power and its own material content becomes itself, it is self-understood that the 'bureaucracy' is a network of practical illusions or the 'illusion of the state.' The bureaucratic spirit is a thoroughly Jesuitical, theological spirit. The bureaucrats are the Jesuits and the theologians of the state. The bureaucracy is the 'republique pretre,' (republican priest).

"Since the bureaucracy is essentially the 'state as formalism,' it is this also in its purpose. Thus the actual purpose of the state appears to the bureaucracy as a purpose against the state. The spirit of the bureaucracy is the 'formal spirit of the state.' It makes therefore the 'formal spirit of the state' or the actual emptiness of spirit of the state into a categorical imperative. The bureaucracy thus is driven to become the final end and purpose of the state. Since the bureaucracy makes its 'formal' purpose into its content, it gets into conflicts everywhere with the 'real' purposes. It is therefore necessary to substitute the form for the content, the content for the form. The purposes of the state are transformed into administrative ones, or the administrative purposes into state purposes. The bureaucracy is a circle out of which no one can get. Its hierarchy is a hierarchy of knowledge. The apex entrusts to the lower circles insight into particular things, and the lower circles entrust to the apex insights into the universal and thus they mutually interchange."

This is the social anatomy of the Stalinist bureaucracy. This is not the bureaucracy of a backward economy. It is not a degeneration. It has not arisen from struggles over consumption. It has no proletarian base. It is the climax of a historical stage, when the subjective desires of the masses, the "real humanity,



become so objective, that the abstract, the subjective, the formal, "the state as formalism," the state as deceiver, becomes the sole purpose of the state. In the present condition of the world it becomes a theoretical necessity to cut this monster off from all connection with the socialist idea, to place it where it belongs - an organic part of the old forces, suppressing the new.

Let us continue.

"The bureaucracy is the imaginary state besides the real state, the spiritualism of the state. Everything therefore has a double meaning, a real one and a bureaucratic one, as knowledge is double, real knowledge and bureaucratic, (also the will). The real essence is handled according to its bureaucratic essence, according to its other worldly spiritual essence. The bureaucracy has the essence of the state, the spiritual essence of society in its possession, it is its private property. The general spirit of the bureaucracy is the secret, the mystery, guarded internally through the hierarchy, externally as the closed corporation. The apparent spirit of the state, the opinion of the state, appear therefore to the bureaucracy as a treason to its mysteries. Authority is therefore the principle of its knowledge, and deifying of authority is its principle. Within itself, however, spiritualism becomes a crass materialism, the materialism of passive obedience, of belief in authority, the mechanism of fixed formal behavior, fixed principles, observations, traditions. As for the individual bureaucrat, the purpose of the state becomes a private purpose, a hunt for higher posts, for careers. First, he regards real life as material, for the spirit of this life has its exclusive existence in the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy must therefore proceed to make living as material as possible. Secondly, it is material for itself, i.e., so far as it becomes an object of bureaucratic handling, for its spirit is prescribed to it, its purpose lies outside of it, its existence is the existence of administration. The state exists henceforth only as fixed spirits of various offices, whose connection is subordination and passive obedience. Actual science appears as without content, actual life is as dead, for the imaginary knowing and imaginary living pass as the essence. The bureaucrat must therefore believe Jesuitically with the actual state, be this Jesuitism now conscious, or unconscious. It is, however, necessary that as soon as his opposite is knowing he also achieves self-consciousness and purposeful Jesuitism." (Marx, The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right)

It is only necessary to remind the reader that both Hegel and Marx were operating on the basis of the new barriers to universality posed by capitalist production.

In the review, "After Ten Years," I could touch only briefly (such are the trials of political minorities), upon the dehumanization of the Russian bureaucracy. (p.19). The same article says:

"In socialist society or in a society transitional to socialism, politics, science, art, literature, education all become truly social. The individual is able to exercise his gifts to the highest capacity, to become truly universal, because of the essentially collective life of the society in which he lives. Look at Stalinist society. No individual is more 'political' than the individual in Stalinist society. Nowhere are art, literature, education, science, so integrated with 'society.' This is the appearance. In reality, never before has there been such a prostitution of all these things for the corruption and suppression of the direct producer, with the resulting degradation of the producers and managers alike." (p. 19)

These regimes are driven to carry the 'state as formalism' to its next extreme point. Hitler called his state the truest democracy, his community was the folk-community of the whole nation. His regime was "socialism." The Stalinist regime goes farther. The state possesses all the virtues. The internationalist conception of human welfare is maintained through the connection with the corrupt and depraved Communist Parties and the constant appeal to the masses of the world. The state guarantees a "genuine" democracy, a "genuine" freedom of speech. Science, art and literature, like production, exist only to serve equality (within reason) and fraternity, honor, loyalty, chivalry, geniality, are the possession of all the people (except the Trotskyites.) The leader is the leader because he possesses all these qualities to a superlative degree. Any oppositionist to the slightest of these claims becomes immediately an enemy devoid of all these virtues and fit only for extermination. The totality of the abstraction is to be explained only by the totality of the deprivation. Today this state is not only confined to Russia as an isolated phenomenon. It is spreading. Trotsky taught that the growth of the Stalinist state was due to the struggle over consumption. We cannot accept this at all. That theory is fraught with terrible dangers which insists that ten to fifteen million men in slave-labor camps and the most highly-organized police-state in history are the mere by-products of a higher mode of production. The Stalinist state is the completest expression of the class state - not the distorted beginning of something new but the culmination, the final form of the old. To believe that this state has roots only in consumption and not in the whole productive system is to saddle the concepts of Marxian socialism with a burden which they cannot indefinitely carry.

Of precisely the same genre are the abstractions of the bourgeois democracies, different not in quality but only in degree. Phrases like the "Century of the Common Man" and the "Four Freedoms" are abstractions to satisfy the suppression of objective needs. The League of Nations of 1919 becomes the United Nations of 1947. The more concrete the negation of the need the more abstract, empty and flamboyant becomes the subjective mediation.

#### The Proletarian Negation

There is a school of Marxists today who preach the ridiculous doctrine that in Russia today politics governs production. In reality, production governs politics. In appearance, the state takes hold of capital. In reality, capital takes hold of the state, and upon the mediation of the antagonisms of social and political life is superimposed the antagonisms of capitalist production itself. In its most developed form, it is state-capital. It is this modern state, controlling everything and for that reason, the negation of universality for all, it is this state which is to be negated. The negation of this is the completed expression of the negation of the negation. The agent of this negation is the revolutionary proletariat. When the modern millions take hold of this state, they negate the root of their degradation, production itself; for to control the state of state-capitalism is to control production itself. It is at this moment that the state begins to wither away. The withering away of the state is not a phrase. None of the great Marxist dicta are phrases. The modern state being what it is and the modern masses being what they are, the resolution of the antagonism implies the substitution of the masses for the state, but of the masses emancipated and seeking to exercise that universality, to suppress which was the reason for the existence of the state.

I can best sum up by a quotation from an article I wrote in The New Internationalist of June 1944:

"But the outstanding feature of the contemporary world is that the principles for which Christianity stood in its best days are now regarded as matters of

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life and death by the average worker: This is no accident at all though we can only state the facts here. European civilization must become a unity. Hundreds of millions of European workers know that this must be achieved or the continent will perish. Equality of nations? That, too, the great masses of Europe passionately desire, not as an ideal but to be able to live in peace. A central government to represent the interests of all! As late as 1935, Lord Cecil could get eleven million votes in a plebiscite in Britain supporting the idea of a League of Nations. And when workers say a League of Nations and collective security they mean it. And that early attempt to succor the poor, to help the afflicted, to teach the ignorant? The great mass of the workers in European countries conceive of Labor Parties as doing just that, within the conditions of the modern world."

Our anti-dialecticians believe the negation of negation and the inevitability of socialism are religion. But when one attempts to penetrate into their philosophy of history, one increasingly meets a vacuum or the most arbitrary combinations of historical phenomena, tied together by bits of string, by subjective analysis and a crude determinism which even sometimes has the presumption to call itself Marxism. For us there is no philosophy of history without Marxism, and there can be no Marxism without the dialectic. History becomes reasonable. In the article quoted above, I continued:

"He who would exhibit the Marxist method must grasp the full significance of that early uprising of the masses when Christianity proclaimed its message. We must watch not only the primitiveness and simplicity of its aims but their comprehensive scope. Then by slow degrees, through the centuries we see one part of the aim becoming concrete for one section of the population, and then another part for another section. Ideas arise from concrete conditions to become partially embodied in social classes and give rise to further interrelations between the spiral of real and ideal, content and form. This is the dialectic to which Marx gave a firm materialist basis in the developing processes of production. As society develops, the possibilities for the individual development of man become greater and greater, but the conflict of classes becomes sharper and sharper. We stand today at an extreme state of these interrelated phenomena of social development. When a modern worker demands the right of free speech, the right of free press, of free assembly, continuous employment, social insurance, the best medical attention, the best education, he demands in reality the 'social republic.' Spinoza and Kant would stand aghast at what the average worker takes for granted today. But he does not demand them as an individual or in the primitive manner the early Christians did. In America, for instance, there are some thirteen million workers organized for nothing else but the preservation and extension of these values. These are the values of modern civilization. They are embodied in the very web and texture of the lives of the masses of the people. Never were such precious values so resolutely held as necessary to complete living by so substantial and so powerful a section of society. Socialism means simply the complete expansion and fulfillment of these values in the life of the individual. This can only be attained by the most merciless struggle of the whole class against its capitalist masters. The realization of this necessity is the final prelude to full self-consciousness."

You still believe, gentlemen, that these ideas and conclusions are the result of some form of religion? Go your way. God be with you. Amen.

#### The Proletariat and the Revolution

845 Bolshevism is above all a philosophy of life and a political conception. The political conception is the organized preparation for the inevitable proletarian revolution. Lenin was the originator of Bolshevism, the Marxism of our time. The world was to be saved by reason, but reason lay not in the heads of

philosophers and intellectuals but in the actions of the masses. The world as we know it, under the control of its present masters, is unreasonable, chaotic, lacking in energy and creative force; gangrenous, barbarism. For Lenin, reason, order, historical creativeness, lay precisely in the forces which would destroy the old world. This is how he saw the councils of the workers, the Soviets, and the revolutionary actions of the masses in 1905:

"The old power, as a dictatorship of the minority, could maintain itself only by the aid of police stratagems, only by preventing and diverting the masses from participating in the government, from controlling the government. The old power, persistently distrusted the masses, feared the light, maintained itself by means of deception. The new power, as a dictatorship of the overwhelming majority, could and did maintain itself only by winning the confidence of the great masses, only by drawing, in the freest, broadest, and most energetic manner, all the masses into the work of government. Nothing hidden, nothing secret, no regulations, no formalities. You are a workingman? You wish to fight to liberate Russia from a handful of police thugs? Then you are our comrade. Choose your delegate at once, immediately. Choose as you think best. We shall willingly and gladly accept him as a full member of our Soviet of Workers' Deputies, of our Peasants' Committee, of our Soviet of Soldiers' Deputies, etc., etc. It is a power that is open to all, that does everything in sight of the masses and their will. Such was the new power, or rather its embryo, for the victory of the old power very soon trampled upon the tender shoots of this new plant." (Selected Works, Vol. VII, pp. 252-253)

That is the voice of Bolshevism. There is the most profound philosophy of history behind this call to revolt. There are innumerable people opposed to bourgeois society, as they think, but who fear the uprising of the proletarian masses from that passive obedience, which is precisely the basis of bourgeois society. They want socialism but want to be sure of order, system, reason. Lenin had a philosophical conception of where order was to be sought.

"When the history of humanity moves forward at the speed of a locomotive (the petty-bourgeois intellectual) calls it a 'whirlwind,' a 'deluge,' the 'disappearance' of all 'principles and ideas.' When history moves at the speed of a horse and cart he calls it reason, system. When the masses themselves, with all their virgin primitiveness, their simple, rough determination, begin to make history, to apply 'principles and theories' directly and immediately, the bourgeois takes fright and wails that 'reason is thrust into the background.' (Is not the very opposite the case, you philistine heroes? Is it not precisely in such moments of history that the reason of the masses is displayed rather than the reason of single individuals? Is it not precisely at such times that reason of the masses becomes a living, active force, and not an armchair force?) When direct action by the masses is crushed by shootings, executions, floggings, unemployment and famine, when the bugs of professorial science, ... crawl out of the cracks and begin to speak on behalf of the people, in the name of the masses, and sell and betray the interests of the latter to a privileged few, the knights of philistinism imagine that an epoch of peace and of calm progress has set in, that 'the turn of sense and reason has now come again.'" (Selected Works, vol. VII, pp. 260-261)

The bourgeois world is rejected completely. Only what destroys it is reasonable.

It is from this conclusion that our anti-dialecticians shrink in terror. Anything, anything, even the civilization collapsing before their eyes, rather than the proletarian revolution.



But the reason of the masses is not merely destructive. It is destructive of the bourgeois world. The reason of the masses is itself a mighty creative force once bourgeois society is destroyed.

"The point is that it is precisely the revolutionary periods that are distinguished for their greater breadth, greater wealth, greater intelligence, greater and more systematic activity, greater audacity and vividness of historical creativeness compared with periods of philistine, Cadet, reformist progress. But Mr. Blank and Co. picture it the other way about. They pass off poverty as historical-creative wealth. They regard the inactivity of the suppressed, downtrodden masses as the triumph of the 'systematic' activity of the bureaucrats and the bourgeoisie. They shout about the disappearance of sense and reason, when the picking to pieces of parliamentary bills by all sorts of bureaucrats and liberal 'penny-a-liners' gives way to a period of direct political activity by the 'common people,' who in their simple way directly and immediately destroy the organs of oppression of the people, seize power, appropriate for themselves what was considered to be the property of all sorts of plunderers of the people - in a word, precisely when the sense and reason of millions of downtrodden people is awakening, not only for reading books, but for action, for living human action, for historical creativeness." (Selected Works, Vol. VII, pp. 261-262)

This is creative reason during the revolution and this is creative reason after the revolution. Readers of the following articles in this pamphlet and of the documents of our tendency will know that for us the economic planning of the new society must be the result of the same creativeness and energy of the masses expressed through their soviets, their councils, their party or parties. As we have shown in our pamphlet\*, this was Lenin's conception. For us, therefore, once the masses in Russia were totally subordinated to the bureaucracy, then capital as an economic force resumed sway, and objective economic law reasserted itself. The proletarians of the fourteenth century failed, but the masses today begin from a society in which the socialization of the labor process is the dominant feature of the economy. The education, the training, the discipline, the social awareness, the material and spiritual needs of the great millions have reached astonishing proportions. These are the new economic forces. They are world wide. If the earlier revolutions were outstanding peaks in a world in which the periphery was large, backward and stagnant, it is not so today. Disparate as are the economic levels of the United States and China, the world is today one system and a social unit. The need for universality of the individual man is only part of the need for universality in the world at large: "only with this universal development of productive forces is a universal intercourse between men established which produces in all nations simultaneously the phenomenon of the 'propertyless' mass (universal-competition), makes each nation dependent on the revolutions of the others, and finally has put world-historical, empirically-universal individuals in place of local ones." Thus Marx in The German Ideology in 1846. Today, we are at the end. The Grimethorpe miner, the UAW auto-worker, the Tokyo proletarian, these are world-historical empirically universal individuals. This they have become through the socialized labor of scientific production, popular education, cheap literature, the newspaper, the radio, the unending disorders of bourgeois society, its military training, the inhuman bestialities by which it seeks to maintain itself. Inevitable and indivisible are the destruction of the criminals who are ruining our civilization and the consequent realization by the proletarian millions of their world-historical universality, no longer empirical but completely self-conscious.

\* The Invading Socialist Society, pp. 24-25



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The Concrete and the Abstract in Practical Politics

It would be a grave mistake not to attempt to show, however briefly, the theoretical link between these concepts and the practical activity of building a revolutionary organization. The dialectician is often seriously thrown back by the fact that the great masses of the workers do not seem to think in a way that corresponds to these ideas. He should remember that the number who thought of socialist revolution in Russia in February 1917 was pitifully few. There is no record of one single republican in the France of July 14, 1789. How many of the Founding Fathers advocated independence in 1776? The anticipations of these ideas accumulate and then under suitable conditions explode into a new quality.

But with the masses the matter goes even deeper. They do not think as intellectuals do, and this intellectuals must understand. In one of his most remarkable pages Lenin confesses that at a critical moment of the Russian Revolution he was performing the most important of all tasks, evaluating the events of July in order to change the policy and organization of the Bolshevik Party. He was living with a working-class family. The hostess placed bread on the table. "Look," says the host, "what fine bread. 'They' dare not give us bad bread now. And we had almost forgotten that good bread could be had in Petrograd."

Let Lenin himself continue.

"I was amazed at this class evaluation of the July days. My mind had been revolving around the political significance of the event, weighing its importance in relation to the general course of events, analyzing the situation that had given rise to this zigzag of history and the situation it would create, and debating how we must alter our slogans and Party apparatus in order to adapt them to the changed situation. As for bread, I who had never experienced want, never gave it a thought. Bread seemed to me a matter of course, a byproduct as it were of the work of a writer. Fundamentally, the mind approaches the class struggle for bread by a political analysis and an extraordinarily complicated and involved path.

"But this representative of the oppressed class, although one of the better-paid and well-educated workers, took the bull by the horns with that astonishing simplicity and bluntness, with that firm resolution and amazingly clear insight, which is as remote from your intellectual as the stars in the sky." (Selected Works, Vol. VI., pp. 280-1)

The key phrase in this passage is "although one of the better-paid and well-educated workers." Better-paid and well-educated workers are very often corrupted by bourgeois education. It is the great millions, very often unorganized in unions but "disciplined, united and organized" by the very mechanism of capitalist production itself that constitute the most heroic, the most self-sacrificing battalions of the new social order. They do not approach great questions by a complicated and involved path as intellectuals do. Their most effective method of expression is action, corresponding to the "astonishing simplicity, bluntness, firm resolution and amazingly clear insight" of their speech when they do speak. For long years they appear entirely subordinated to bourgeois ideas and the place bourgeois society has reserved for them. But they have ideas of their own and in the continuous crisis and catastrophic decline of society, they have in recent decades repeatedly entered upon the field of history with world-shaking effects. Since 1917, no lasting victory has been theirs but the future is with them or there is no future.

Revolutionary politics consists of a conscious relating of the needs of the objective situation to the stage of development of the masses. But decisive always is the objective situation. In the world of today, a superficial conception of the

stage of development of the masses can be a terrible trap for the unwary.

The quest for universality which constitutes the past history of humanity is a quest for concrete conditions of life adequate to man's real humanity. Today, above all, this need for universality is part of the organic, elemental psychology of workers. In our world, with its uninterrupted continuity of crises and catastrophes, this need of the workers can explode with terrible rapidity and assume in a few hours a quality totally unsuspected by those who have not grasped the depth of the modern crisis.

For Hegel all that is rational is real. For Marxists, what is real is what the objective development of the productive forces demands. Everything less than this is objectively inadequate and therefore abstract. Today, because of all man's past history and particularly because of the development of the productive forces, the quest is all-embracing. It is embedded in every immediate question and demands that the posing of such a universal perspective be linked to every immediate question. Only such a perspective is adequate to the masses.

Hence, it is those revolutionaries who emphasize a program of immediate concrete questions who are in reality abstract, and those who pose the total perspective of humanity who are in reality concrete. No addition or accumulation of such abstract or inadequate demands can substitute for the posing of the ultimate perspective, or concrete universal. Similarly, no perspective of never-sharpening series of partial struggles can substitute for the revolution. The Social-Democrats thought that it was an accumulation of members and representatives which would transform society. They were the Zenos of yesterday. The contemporary Zenos are those who try to teach the masses revolutionary perspectives and solutions only through an accumulation of immediate demands and battles.

The objective conditions of our world demand universal solutions. It is absolutely impossible to propose a proletarian program to counter the imperialism of the "Marshall Plan" without counterposing an international plan of socialist economic construction. That is the world in which we live. In Europe, adequate wages, stable prices, food, housing and heating are no longer partial questions. Any reasonable satisfaction of the needs of the people demands a total reorganization of the economy, a plan for continental rehabilitation and close association with the economic power of the United States. Peace is indivisible. The need for universality stretches out from the hearth to the whole world.

But the same need exists intensively. It is the crime of capitalism that it uses men only partially. Labor bureaucracies which call on men only for votes or sending telegrams, are only partially mobilizing vast stores of creative energy which are crying for release. Bankrupt economies which cannot mobilize the universality contained in modern man are doomed to remain bankrupt. Objectively and subjectively, the solution of the crisis demands a total mobilization of all forces in society. That and nothing else but that can rebuild the vast wreck which is the modern world. Partial solutions only create further disorders in the economy; partial demands, as such, because they are abstractions from the reality, lead only to disappointment; partial demands by leaders on the workers fail to mobilize their energies and leave them with a sense of frustration and hopelessness. Thus not only the concept but the need for universality reigns throughout all phases of society.

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This was one of the great themes of Trotsky before he was murdered in 1940. Whatever was not revolutionary was abstract and an abstraction is a weapon in the hands of the enemy. In previous periods the socialists fought for partial demands and held before the masses the social revolution as a distant goal. Today those days are over. The revolutionaries hold always before the masses the concept of the proletarian revolution but do not neglect to snatch this and that partial demand to better the conditions of the toilers and mobilize them for the final struggle.

This only is reason. The modern intellectual, once he breaks with bourgeois conceptions, finds a vast new world of ideas open before him. But he can pursue and present these ideas in their inner essence only with the inevitable universality of the revolutionary proletariat in mind. Without this there is no dialectic, and without dialectic, thought soon bogs down in the chaotic disintegration of the modern world. Quite different is it with the dialectical materialist. In his boldest flights, he is conscious that he will not exceed the real history of humanity which is being prepared by the revolutionary masses.

- J.R. Johnson

September 1947

# Historical Retrogression Or Socialist Revolution

The document of the German comrades, "Capitalist Barbarism or Socialism," proposes a thesis of historical retrogression and a program of "democratic-political revolution" which in my view is in fundamental opposition to the general principles of Marxism and the specific perspectives of the Fourth International for the socialist revolution in Europe. I propose here to refute them as comprehensively as possible in the space at my disposal.

## PART I: THE THEORY OF THE QUESTION

The retrogressionists post their thesis in Hegelian terms. We have therefore first to grapple with the dialectic.

In the Dialectic of Nature, Engels lists the three basic laws: (1) The law of the transformation of quantity into quality. (2) The law of the interpenetration of the opposites. (3) The law of the negation of the negation. The third "figures as the fundamental law for the construction of the whole system." The interconnection can be demonstrated as follows:

Capitalist society is a negation of a previous organism, feudal society. It consists of two opposites, capital and labor, interpenetrated—one cannot be conceived without the other. The contradiction between capital and labor develops by degrees in a constant series of minor negations. Thus, commercial capitalism, through quantitative changes in the mode of production, develops a new quality and is transformed into industrial capitalism with, of course, corresponding changes in its opposite, labor. This industrial capitalism is further negated by monopoly capitalism which is further negated by state-monopoly capitalism. But this increasing negativity, i.e., this constant transformation into a higher stage in a certain direction, only sharpens the fundamental antagonism which constitutes the organism. The maturity of the organism is demonstrated by the fact that the contradictions become so developed that the organism can no longer contain them. There arises the necessity of a complete negation, not of successive stages of development but of the organism itself. The organism will be negated, abolished, transcended by the antagonisms developed within its own self, without the intervention of any third party. That is negation of the negation. That is abolition or self-abolition.

The key word for us here is the word *abolition* (German: *Aufhebung*). The retrogressionists use the word *Selbst-Aufhebung*. The implication is that this means self-abolition, while *aufhebung* means plain abolition. But in the dialectic of Hegel and Marx, all abolition of an organism means self-abolition. Two years ago I had to deal with this very question and wrote as follows:

"For the word abolition, *aufhebung*, Marx went again to Hegel, to show quite clearly what he had in mind. *Aufhebung* does not mean mere non-existence, or abolition, as you abolish a hot dog or wipe some chalk off a board. As Hegel explains at length (*Logic*, tr. Johnston and Struthers, vol. 1, p. 120), it means for him transcendence, raising of one moment or active factor from its subordinate position in the dialectical contradiction to its rightful and predestined place, superseding the opposite moment with which it is interpenetrated, i.e., inseparably united, in this case, raising labor, the basis of all value, to a dominant position over the other moment, the mass of accumulated labor. Thereby self-developing humanity takes the place formerly held by self-developing value. The real history of humanity will begin." (*Internal Bulletin*, April, 1943.)

In *The Holy Family*, Marx has a long passage, of which this is a fair sample:

"... The proletariat is as proletariat forced to abolish itself and with this, the opposite which determines it, private property. It is the negative side of the opposition, its principle of unrest."

"If the proletariat is victorious it does not mean that it has become the absolute side of society, for it is victorious only by abolishing itself and its opposite. Then both the proletariat and its conditioning opposite, private property, have vanished."

In *Capital* itself, the word he almost invariably uses for the abolition of capitalist production is *Aufhebung*, i.e., its substitution by socialist production, its own interpenetrated opposite.

## Dialectic as Scientific Method

In 1915, Lenin wrote that "dialectic is the theory of knowledge of (Hegel and) Marxism." (*Collected Works*, vol. 13, pp. 321-327.) And Lenin not only calls this "the essence of the matter but condemns Plekhanov and other Marxists for paying "no attention" to it. This, for Marx and Lenin, is a scientific method, not faith.

It is this grave weakness in Plekhanov which has led to so much confusion in Marxism and the dialectic. As Lenin saw, Hegel, idealist though he might be, understood this perfectly. In the *Larger Logic* (tr. Johnston and Struther, p. 65, vol. 1) he says:

"The one and only thing for securing scientific progress (and for quite simple insight into which, it is essential to strive) is knowledge of the logical precept that Negation is just as much Affirmation as Negation."

All the great Marxists understood that for the scientific analysis of capitalist society, you must postulate the positive in the negative, the affirmation in the negation, i.e., the inevitability of socialism. Give it up, play with it and you lose, for example, the Marxist theory of the socialist revolution as the culmination of the daily class struggle. If the revolution is not understood as rooted inevitably in the objective necessity of socialism, then it is attributed to the subjective consciousness of the leaders. It is because the Mensheviks and the Eastmans deny the inevitability of socialism that they repudiate the Marxist conception of the party and accuse the Bolsheviks of imposing their dialectical religion upon the Russian workers in October, 1917. For the Mensheviks and the Eastmans, Russia could have had either a democratic revolution or the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin and Trotsky always maintained the opposite, that they were acting in accordance with inner historic necessity as it expressed itself concretely in 1917.

Hegel could not maintain the dialectical method consistently because he based himself on the inevitability of bourgeois society. Marx could retain and extend it only by basing himself on the inevitability of socialism. As he wrote to Weydemeyer on March 5, 1852, he had discovered neither the class struggle nor the economic anatomy of the classes.

"What I did that was new was to prove... that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Perhaps the most useful statement of dialectic as a scientific theory for Marxists is made by Rosa Luxemburg (*Reform and Revolution*):

"What precisely was the key which enabled Marx to open the door to the secrets of capitalist phenomena? The secret of Marx's theory of value, of his analysis of the problem of money, of his theory of capital, of the theory of the rate of profit, and consequently of the entire economic system, is found in the transitory character of capitalist economy, the inevitability of its collapse, leading—and this is only another aspect of the same phenomena (emphasis mine—J. R. J.)—to socialism... And it is precisely because he took the socialist viewpoint for his analysis of bourgeois society that he was in the position to give a scientific basis to the socialist movement."

Bernstein believed that *Capital* was not scientific because Marx had had the conclusions in his head long before he wrote it. He did not understand that Marx could only write it because he took as a premise the transitory nature of capitalist society and the inevitability of socialism. This is the guide to Marxist theory. The test is in practice. If the inevitability of socialism is the key by which Marx opened the door to his world-shaking discoveries, the "if the world revolution falls to come" is the key by which the retrogressionists open the door to theirs.

## "The Invading Socialist Society"

As far back as *Anti-Dühring* (1878), Marx and Engels saw socialism invading and dialectically altering capitalism.

"In the trusts, freedom of competition changes into its opposite (emphasis mine—J. R. J.), into monopoly. The planless production of capitalist society capitulates before the planned production of the invading socialist society."

This is the philosophical concept which permeates "The Histor-



ical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation," the most famous chapter in *Capital* and all Marxist writing. This for the retrogressionists is their "center of gravity." Let us see what Marx says:

The very laws of capitalist production bring forth the "material agencies" for its dissolution—concentration of production and socialization of labor. But on these material agencies as basis spring up "new forces and new passions." This is the proletariat. "Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labor at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder." This is the proletarian revolution.

Only then does Marx sum up the process in terms of property which is a legal, historical manifestation of the productive process. He says:

"The capitalist... mode of appropriation, the result of the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property."

Production, appropriation, property.  
"This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labor of the proprietor."

Labor, you note, is the foundation. A certain kind of property is the result of a certain mode of production, a certain type of labor.

"But capitalist production begets with the inexorability of a law of nature its own negation. It is the negation of negation. This does not reestablish private property for the producer but gives him individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era, i.e., on cooperation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production."

Hitherto among Marxists and anti-Marxists, this was understood to mean socialism. The retrogressionists challenge this. They say:

"The capitalist mode of production begets its own negation with the inexorability of a law of nature even if the socialist revolution fails to come."

This they tell us is the "deepest essence of the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation." So that when Marx wrote "negation of the negation" he did not mean socialism only. He meant that capitalist private property and capitalist production were going to be negated, destroyed, proletariat or no proletariat. This, Marx's most emphatic statement of the proletarian socialist revolution as the inevitable alternative to capitalism, is historically, i.e., in life, interpreted to mean that capitalist property can be abolished and a new kind of state (bureaucrati-collectivist, managerial) will take its place. This certainly is the most remarkable interpretation of Marxism ever made and is likely to remain so.

**Class Struggle or National Struggle**

I have to confine myself here to its immediate political consequences. The material self-abolition of capital is for the retrogressionists a process by which the capitalists expropriate one another and the many capitalist nations are expropriated by one. In their preoccupation with the expropriation of the property, they lose sight of the antagonistic rôles of bourgeoisie and proletariat in the process of production.

It appears immediately in their analysis of Europe. This is based not upon the class struggle in production between the German centralization of European capital and the European working class. For them, the basic analysis is of one imperialist nation oppressing and expropriating other nations. The native bourgeoisie of the occupied countries is not defined basically in its economic association with the centralized capital of Europe but as part of the expropriated and exploited nations. The class struggle of the European proletariat against the existing capitalist society is thus replaced by the national struggle of individual nations, including bourgeoisie and workers. Hence the national struggle for them is not primarily a class struggle to overthrow a certain mode of production but a struggle to "reconstruct the whole screwed-back development, to regain all the achievements of the bourgeoisie (including the labor movement), to reach the highest accomplishments and to excel them." But if the proletariat is to "reconstruct the whole screwed-back development," etc., etc., then the task of the proletariat can only be to rebuild the whole bourgeois-democratic, i.e., the national, structure. Turn and twist as they may, the retrogressionists are in a vise from which they cannot escape.

**The Economic Laws of Motion: The "General Law"**

Without a firm grasp of the laws of production, you are blown all ways by every wind. Let us see what the retrogressionists do with the general law of capitalist accumulation which is Marx's

theoretical basis for the historical, i.e., the actual, living tendency. The retrogressionists say:

"The theory of the retrogressive movement is therefore no more than the theoretical grasp of the laws of motion of the capitalist mode of production at the point of transformation into their opposite in the reversal determined by its contents, in which they become concretely demonstrable laws of its collapse independent of the proletarian revolution." (P. 334.)

Marx has summed up the general law as the law of the organic composition of capital, the relation of the constant capital (the mass of machinery, concrete labor, use-values) to the variable capital (labor-power, the only source of value). The relation is 1:1, then 2:1, then 3:1, then 4:1, etc. This developing ratio is the organic law of capitalist society, i.e., it is of the very nature of the organism.

You would expect that anyone who had discovered economic laws of retrogression would show how this law was in retrogression. But you search the retrogressionist document in vain. Not a word. Why? Because no such economic movement exists. Where in the world is there any retrogression in this organic law? In fascist Germany the relation of constant to variable capital increased enormously. In Britain, in the U.S.A., in Japan, in China, in India, in Latin America, the war has seen a vast increase; the post-war will see a still greater. What post-war Germany does will go to increase the ratio of its neighbors. Whatever production does take place in Germany will take place according to the organic composition of 1945 and not according to that of 1845.

If the victorious powers dare to deindustrialize Germany, all that they will do is to transform millions of proletarians into an industrial reserve army on a vast scale which is precisely the "absolute general law of capitalist accumulation." Colonization of France or Germany can only be an agitational phrase. In the sense of a historical retrogression it means creating a countryside like that in India or China with feudal and semi-feudal peasants comprising the large majority of the population. The relations of production, the social relations and the whole political structure of those countries would be altered. A bourgeois-democratic revolution would be on the order of the day. The victorious imperialisms, as Lenin foresaw, cannot do it. Capitalist competition, which is in its present form imperialist war, compels them to obey the general law of capitalist accumulation and tomorrow will force them to rearm, i.e., reindustrialize Germany. Into these Marxist fundamentals they have introduced an unexampled confusion.

**Retrogression and the Industrial Reserve Army**

The retrogressionists say: "Under imperialism production is carried on in a capitalist manner from A to Z, but all relations from A to Z are qualitatively altered. The 'camp system,' labor and forced labor service, prisons, etc., become by the massive extent and the manner of their utilization, first, special forms of slave labor, and beyond that, imperialist forms of utilizing the capitalist overpopulation." (P. 342.)

Wasn't it Marx who told us that the antagonism of capitalist production "vents its rage in the creation of that monstrosity, the industrial reserve army, kept in misery in order to be always at the disposal of capital." If today they are kept in labor camps, it is because the proletarian movement toward the socialist future is such that capital must assume complete control over the workers not only inside but outside of the process of production. But do these workers "qualitatively" produce more surplus value or less? Do they alter the organic law? Do they modify or accentuate the contradiction between use-value and value? Do they become isolated groups of slaves, serfs on widely separated latifundia, on manorial farms, or on medieval peasant allotments? Do they acquire the social and political characteristics of slaves and serfs in the Middle Ages? To this last question the retrogressionists answer "Yes." They say that society "harks back in reverse order to the end of the Middle Ages, the epoch of primitive accumulation, the Thirty Years War, the bourgeois revolutions, etc. In those days it was a question of smashing an outlived economic form and of winning the independence of nations—now it is a question of abolishing independence and shoving society back to the barbarism of the Middle Ages." (Pp. 333-334.)

It is not a question of smashing economic forms, not a question of winning a new society. That is merely the program of the Fourth International. That, they tell us, is not the question. Independence has been abolished, society has been shoved back to the barbarism of the Middle Ages and the proletariat, to save the situation, must



restore democracy. They must write this. Socialized labor, the socialist proletariat, has vanished into the labor camp. The historical initiative is placed entirely in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

According to their mode of scientific analysis, the world revolution cannot but fail to come. The throwback of labor to the Middle Ages is their general law of capitalist accumulation. To think that this can be arrested by democratic slogans is, to put it moderately, a retrogression to the Utopias not even of the nineteenth century but of the Middle Ages.

### The Productive Forces

The retrogressionist thesis claims to be based upon the collapse of capitalism "independently of the question of the extension of the market." (P. 333.) Very good. To this, as is characteristic of them, they give not a word of analysis. I have to try to illustrate the difference between this theory and that of the underconsumptionists.

If you observe the growth of capital empirically, i.e., with bourgeois eyes, then it must appear that as the market declines, the productive power also declines and therefore brings the whole process to a standstill. In reality the struggle for the declining market makes each competitor increase its productive power in order to drive its competitor off the field. Naturally this leads to a fine crash. But in the crash the technologically backward units go under and the system as a whole emerges on a higher technological level—of course to start the whole process again. But the growth of the productive power of capital can come only by the higher organic composition. This leads to the falling rate of profit and it is the falling rate which compels a crisis. In Vol. III of *Capital* (p. 301) Marx says that it is "the fall in the rate of profit [which] calls forth the competitive struggle among the capitalists, not vice versa." Most Marxist commentators recognize that the Marxian crisis is not a crisis of incapacity to sell goods or, in bourgeois terms, of "effective demand." It is when the crisis is imminent that capitalists rush to sell goods and naturally the bottom falls out of the market. Blake expresses it very well, in *An American Looks at Karl Marx*:

"Thus the limiting factor of consumption is a precipitant, the discharge of workers in the means of production is a manifestation, the transferred crack in consumers' purchases the 'cause' of a panic, while all along the crisis is implicit, overcome by accumulation by the stronger..."

Now every serious dispute by serious people about the future of capitalist society will in the long run find the protagonists lined up, in the camp either of the Leninists or the underconsumptionists. The retrogressionists say that they follow the Leninist interpretation. Yet their thesis is that the productive forces have ceased to grow and they quote Lenin and Trotsky. I do not propose to take up Trotsky here. He undoubtedly wrote this many times. He also wrote other passages in apparent contradiction. At any rate he left no developed economic thesis. But Lenin did. He wrote *Imperialism* to prove the decline of capitalism. Nevertheless he states (and more than once): "It would be a mistake to believe that this tendency to decay precludes the possibility of the rapid growth of capitalism. It does not. In the epoch of imperialism, certain branches of industry, certain strata of the bourgeoisie and certain countries betray, to a more or less degree, one or another of these tendencies. On the whole, capitalism is growing far more rapidly than before."

But argument about this does not need quotations from Lenin. In 1929 the productive power was higher than it had ever been; in 1939 it was still higher than it was in 1929; by 1942 it had reached fantastic heights compared with 1939. Do the retrogressionists dare to deny this? War is only capitalist competition carried out by national units, and the laws hold firm. In times of peace the fundamental movement is development of the productive power precisely because "the market" is declining. In war, where the world market is exhausted and can only be redivided, each national state fanatically develops the productive power. If capitalism lasts until 1968, then the preparation for World War III would result in a productive power far beyond that of 1942.

What then is responsible for the retrogressionists' thesis of lack of growth of the productive forces? Having abandoned the inevitability of the socialist revolution, and having adopted a theory of the tendency of capitalist accumulation, which increasingly disorganizes and colonizes the proletariat and hence makes it unfit for the socialist revolution, they cannot see the growth of the productive forces which organizes and disciplines the proletariat in the process of production and prepares it for the socialist revolution. Having

given up the process of production as the means of developing the productive forces and organizing the proletariat, they must look outside the process of production, i.e., to democracy.

### Productive Forces and Social Relations

Underconsumptionists are distinguished by the fact that value plays no part in their analysis. Thus they lose sight of the fundamental contradiction of capitalist production, that between the means of production in its value form (the main concern of the bourgeoisie) and means of production in its material form (the main concern of the proletariat). They thus ruin the possibility of future analysis. A recent article in the *Saturday Evening Post* shows how clearly the bourgeoisie sees its own side of this question. Admiral Ramsey says that all the existing planes must be systematically destroyed because in five years' time they would be obsolete. And not only planes, but means of production. General Arnold demands "research laboratories for ever-increasing aeronautical development, a progressive aviation industry capable of great expansion quickly." Thus essentially as in competition for the market, the material form of the products may be still valuable and able to give great service to the proletariat and the people. But their value, in terms of socially necessary labor time on the world market, is equal only to that of the latest discovery, actual or potential. Hence reorganization of production for more and better production, socialist of labor, increase of the industrial army. The general and the admiral were forward-looking but still did not see far enough. The discovery of atomic energy poses the question of the reorganization of the whole technological system. The second bomb, two days later, made the first obsolete. The retrogressionist thesis makes it impossible to interpret the general capitalist development as socialist society invading capitalism. For then atomic energy is a sign of greater labor camps and therefore of a quicker return to the Middle Ages. Instead of calling upon workers in view of the economic development to prepare for power they are compelled to demand more frantically than ever, a defense of democracy.

What then is the fundamental error of the retrogressionists? They have as always lost sight of the invading socialist society, the socialist future in the capitalist present. Capitalism fetters, i.e., hampers, impedes the development of the productive forces. But it does not bring them to a halt. They move forward by advance, retardation, standstill, but they move forward, bringing the proletariat with them. The theoretical analysis is that the more capitalism increases the productive forces, the more it brings them into conflict with the existing social relations. The more it increases and develops the productive forces the more it socializes labor and the more it degrades it and the more it drives it to revolt. Where Marxism deals in contradictions, growths and deepening of antagonisms, and therefore of class struggle, the retrogressionists deal in absolutes. The productive forces have ceased to grow. Having decided to operate on the basis of "if the world revolution fails to come," the retrogressionists, rudderless, deny historical fact—the growth of the productive forces since 1917—make a complete jumble of Marxian economics, all in order to show society on its way back to the Middle Ages. You do not make these blunders without dragging others, and more serious ones, in their train.

### Idealism and Positivism

The vital question is to get hold of the intimate connection between retrogressionist theory and their practical conclusions. In his *Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic*, Marx pays noble tribute to Hegel for his discovery of the dialectic but foretells that his incapacity to take it further, i.e., to socialism, opens the way to uncritical idealism and equally uncritical positivism. The retrogressionists fall inescapably into both.

In Vol. II Marx divided capital into Department I, means of production and Department II, means of consumption, and bases his further analysis upon this division. The retrogressionists divide the productive forces into means of destruction and means of construction. What is this but idealism—classification according to moral criteria? One stands almost in despair before this muddle. Oil, coal, steel, Willow Run, Curtiss-Wright, were they means of destruction in January 1945? And what are they now in August 1945? Are they once more means of construction? If so, they move from being means of destruction to being means of construction under the same class rule. This is the economics of Philip Murray. The retrogressionists do not know with what sharp weapons they are playing. All Marx's economic categories are social categories.

In the analysis of capital as value, constant capital symbolizes the bourgeoisie, variable capital the proletariat. But men use not value but steel, oil, textiles. Thus, in his analysis of capital as material form, Department I (means of production) is in essence representative of the bourgeoisie and Department II (means of consumption) is representative of the proletariat. The struggle between constant and variable capital, between Department I and Department II is expressive of the struggle of classes. What struggle goes on between means of destruction and means of consumption? The retrogressionists are defining things as things and not according to a social method—the most elementary positivism. But idealism and positivism are not terms of abuse. Politically they mean one thing—analysis of productive forces as things in general, analysis of the proletariat as people in general.

**The Phenomenology of Mind**

Marxism is distinguished from idealism and positivism of all types by the fact that (a) it distinguishes the proletariat from all other classes by its types of labor and (b) by the revolutionary effect upon the proletariat and society of this type of labor.

The concept of labor is the very basis of the dialectic, and not merely of the Marxian dialectic but of the dialectic of Hegel himself. In the *Phenomenology of Mind*,\* in the section on Lordship and Bondage, Hegel shows that the lord has a desire for the object and enjoys it. But because he does not actually work on it, his desire lacks objectivity. The labor of the bondsman, in working, in changing, i.e., in negating the raw material, has the contrary effect. This, his labor, gives him his rudimentary sense of personality. Marx hailed this and continued the basic idea in his analysis of handicraft and the early stages of capitalist production (simple co-operation). The laborer's physical and mental faculties are developed by the fact that he makes a whole chair, a whole table, a piece of armor or a whole shoe.

With the development of the stage of manufacture, however, there begins the division of labor, and here instead of making one object, man begins to produce fragments of an object. In the process of production, there begins a stultification, distortion and ossification of his physical and intellectual faculties.

With the productive process of heavy industry, this stultification is pushed to its ultimate limit. Man becomes merely an appendage to a machine. He now no longer uses the instruments of production. As Marx repeats on page after page, the instruments of production use him. Hegel, who had caught hold of this, was completely baffled by it and seeing no way out, took refuge in idealism. Marx, using the Hegelian method and remaining in the productive process itself, discovered and elaborated one of the most profound truths of social and political psychology. In the very degradation of the workers he saw the basis of their emancipation. Attacking Proudhon for misunderstanding dialectic, he wrote of the laborer in the automatic factory:

"But from the moment that all special development ceases, the need of universality, the tendency towards an integral development of the individual begins to make itself felt." (*Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847)

This need of the individual for universality, for a sense of integration so powerful among all modern oppressed classes, is the key to vast areas of social and political jungles of today. The fascists, for example, understood it thoroughly.

Twenty years later in *Capital* Marx developed the political results of the argument to the full. "It is as a result of the division of labor in manufactures, that the laborer is brought face to face with the intellectual potencies of the material process of production as the property of another and as a ruling power." (Kerr ed., p. 397) He does not need revolutionary parties to teach him this. This process is his revolutionary education. It begins in manufacture. "It is completed in modern industry . . ." This is the misery that is accumulated as capital is accumulated. It may not be formulated. But the moment bourgeois society breaks down and the worker breaks out in insurrection, for whatever incidental purpose, resentment against the whole system explodes with terrible power.\*\*

The educational process is not individual but social. As Marx insisted and Lenin never wearied in pointing out, in addition to this

\*One of the three basic books used by Lenin in his studies for imperialism.

\*\*The babblers who think that all the American workers want is "full employment" are in for a rude awakening. That capitalism increases the use-values (radio, education, books, etc.) that he uses outside of production only increases his antagonism.

personal, individual education, capital educates the worker socially and politically. In *Capital* (pp. 532-3) Marx quoted a passage he had written twenty years before in the *Manifesto*. Former industrial systems, all of them, aimed at conservation of the existing mode of production. Far different is capital:

"Constant revolutions in production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and superstitions 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."

This is the history of Europe during the last thirty years and particularly the last five.

The very climax of Marx's chapter on The General Law is to warn that "This antagonistic character of capitalist accumulation is enunciated in various terms by political economists, although by them it is confounded with phenomena, certainly to some extent analogous but nevertheless essentially distinct and belonging to pre-capitalistic modes of production," i.e., the Middle Ages. And why essentially distinct? Because in capital alone the degradation and its historical conditions also create in the workers the determination to overthrow the system and acquire for themselves the intellectual potencies of the material process of production. Who doesn't understand this in his bones can be a sincere revolutionary but cannot lead the proletariat. The retrogressionists run this conception. They say that "the minute the proletariat loses his right to strike, his freedom of movement, and all political rights," he ceases to be the "classic 'free' proletarian . . ." (p. 331) For the analysis of production and the stages of production, they have substituted the legislative or repressive action of the bourgeois state. They say that "The modern slave differs much less politically from the slave of antiquity than appears at first glance." (p. 331) The retrogressionists carry their democratic conceptions into the process of production itself. They say: "Politically, and to a large extent economically, it (the proletariat) lives under the conditions and forms of slavery." (p. 339) They seem incapable of understanding that increase of misery, subordination, slavery is part of capitalist production and not retrogression.

At this stage we can afford to be empirical. In 1944 the Italian proletariat in North Italy lived under fascism. Mussolini, to placate this proletariat, called his state the Socialist Republic. Every worker who punched the clock and found no work got three-quarters of his day's pay. Mussolini passed decrees which aimed at making the workers believe that industry was socialized. When the Germans were about to leave, these workers negotiated with them and with Mussolini and drove them out. They seized the factories. They hold them to this day. Such is modern industry that a mere general strike poses the socialist revolution and the question of the state-power with workers organized in factory committees and soviets. Yet the retrogressionists say in 1944 that because of the absence of bourgeois-democracy the more you looked at these workers the more you saw how much they resembled the slaves who lived in the Italian latifundia 3000 years ago.

**Revolutionary Perspectives and Proposals**

Except seen in the light of their analysis of the proletariat in production, the revolutionary perspectives of the great Marxists have always seemed like stratospheric ravings.

In 1848 Marx said that "the bourgeois revolution in Germany would be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution." In 1858 he wrote to Engels: "On the continent the revolution is imminent and will immediately assume a socialist character." Twenty years later, introducing Marx's *Civil War in France*, Engels wrote: "Thanks to the economic and political development of France since 1789, Paris has for fifty years been placed in such a position that . . . no revolution could there break out without the proletariat . . . (after victory) immediately putting forward its own demands . . . demands . . . more or less indefinite . . . but the upshot of them all . . . the abolition of the class contrast between capitalist and laborer." The word "immediately" appears every time.

Their enormous confidence is based not upon speculation on the psychology of workers but upon the antagonism of objective relations between labor and capital. From this came their proposals.

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In 1848 in the *Manifesto* Marx says that Communists support every movement against the existing order, but "In all these movements they bring to the front, as the leading question in each, the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time." For whatever its degree of development at the time, at the moment of insurrection, it flies to the fore.

### The Revolutionary Epoch

Production, production, production. By 1905 the miserable individual production of 1871, which had nevertheless produced the Commune, had developed into genuine large-scale industry. Trotsky, watching the revolution in feudal Russia, declared that the victorious bourgeois-democratic revolution would "immediately" assume a socialist character. Lenin, as we know, opposed him. We now know who (despite many important qualifications) was essentially right. 1905 is a very important year. *The development of industry brought the political general strike and the soviets.* They represent the industrially and socially motivated rejection by the workers of bourgeois democracy. Marx's 1850 subjective demand for revolutionary workers' organizations are now objective realities, henceforth inseparable from revolution, as 1917 and post-war Europe and Asia were to show.

In 1938 in the Founding Conference Theses, Trotsky wrote that "The Spanish proletariat has made a series of heroic attempts since April 1931 to take power in its own hands and guide the fate of society." Are these workers in the "true-bourgeois" tradition of forty years?

He says of the French proletariat that "the great wave of sit-down strikes, particularly during June 1936, revealed the whole-hearted readiness of the proletariat to overthrow the capitalist system." He left it to the Philistines of all shades to point out that the Spanish workers in 1931 were thinking only of overthrowing the monarch (as presumably the Belgians today), and the French workers only of the 40-hour week.

In 1940 Trotsky's *Manifesto* had not the faintest breath of retrogression or belief that the workers for forty years have been dominated by "the true bourgeois tradition of revisionism" (p. 340). *He says the exact opposite.* For him in 1939 the workers wanted to "tear themselves free from the bloody chaos" of capitalist society. In 1940 they had "lost practically all democratic and pacifist illusions." Note that we are here a stage beyond 1848. The crimes and failures of the modern bourgeoisie have created the *subjective consciousness* of the modern proletariat which re-enforces the objective antagonism of developed modern industry. Trotsky calmly posed three possibilities. The victory of Anglo-American imperialism, an indecisive struggle, and the victory of Hitler in Europe. The last concerns us most. Fascism would over-run Europe. But that would only be a prelude to a ferocious war with the U. S. The perspective of soviets, armed insurrection and the social revolution would remain. As industry had developed since 1848, so the crisis of 1940 presented us with antagonisms a thousand times more developed including a socialist proletariat. Yet there is never a word from the retrogressionists as to the relation of their theory to the perspectives of the leader of the Fourth International.

### Historical Retrogression

What would be a retrogression? In the Junius pamphlet (1914) Rosa Luxemburg, although opposed to the imperialist war, put forward a program which did not call for social revolution. Lenin attacked this as a national program. The "objective historical" situation demanded the socialist revolution. He said that a throw-back in Europe, i.e., retrogression, was not impossible, if the war ENDED in the domination of Europe by one state. . . . This was exactly Trotsky's point when he emphasized that even if Hitler won in 1940, he would have to fight the United States. The war, i.e., the bourgeois crisis would not be ended. If, continued Lenin, the proletariat remained impotent for twenty years. Who, who (now) dares to say that the European proletariat is impotent? The impotence of the whole European proletariat for twenty years would not be retrogression. In addition, for the same twenty years, the American and the Japanese proletariat must fail to achieve a socialist revolution. Then, and only then, after several decades, or in the time of our sons' sons (Trotsky in 1938) would the revolutionary socialist movement recognize retrogression and

once more raise the national program of the restoration of the bourgeois national state.\*

But the retrogressionists, the vanguard of the vanguard, no sooner saw Hitler dominating Europe, then in the very midst of the war, when the whole situation was in flux, they proclaimed their labor camp theory and a "democratic-political revolution" for national independence and democracy. Not only that. Their economic analysis (such as it is) leads them to foresee that the victorious imperialist nations, Anglo-American and Russian imperialism, will continue the same process. Hence their "democratic political revolution" still holds the stage.

### Two Types of Democratic Demands

It should be obvious that what Lenin said about "democratic demands" has nothing at all to do with this dispute. It would be a crying and intolerable imposition to attempt to confuse the two. For Lenin all democratic demands in advanced countries were a means of mobilizing workers to overthrow the bourgeoisie. He said that we could have socialist revolution without one democratic demand being realized. The retrogressionists say we must have a "democratic-political revolution" so as to give the workers a chance to "reconstruct" the whole "screwed-back development," and to learn to link scientific socialism to the labor movement. The two perspectives are at opposite poles. Never before has any revolutionary made such a proposal. Trotsky proposed that the democratic slogans of right to organize and free press be raised in fascist countries, but warned that they should not be a "noose fastened to the neck of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie's agents." (Founding Conference.) Writing of "transitional demands in fascist countries," he warned: "Fascism plunged these countries into political barbarism. But it did not change their social structure. Fascism is a tool in the hands of finance-capital and not of feudal landowners. A revolutionary program should base itself on the dialectics of the class struggle, obligatory also to fascist countries, and not on the psychology of terrified bankrupts." For him the Soviets "will cover Germany before a new Constitutional Assembly will gather in Weimar."\*\* But the retrogressionists do not propose democratic demands which are to be thrown aside as soon as the masses move. They do the exact opposite. They propose a revolution for democratic demands. What is this but a rejection of the social revolution until later when the whole "screwed-back development" will have been "reconstructed." This is the theory. Let us see how it measures up to events.

## PART II

### THE TEST OF EVENTS

I propose now to test the retrogressionist theory by analysis of the events in Europe. The history of Europe in 1914-39 ensured rapid catastrophe for the bourgeoisie and therefore the immediate emergence of the socialist proletariat. There is where to begin. The first shock was the defeat of France, which, coupled with the subsequent collaboration of the bourgeoisie, drove out the last illusions about the rotten fabric of bourgeois democracy and gave an indication of the tempo of development. The defeat of the air blitz against Britain meant that in the course of the next three or four years modern production would unloose on one side or the other or on both such a weight of steel and lead and explosive as would make any long war impossible. The same would also loosen every bolt of the bourgeois structure. The performance of the Russian armies in front of Moscow, Leningrad and the great battle at Stalingrad not only proclaimed the defeat of Germany but posed to the workers the imminent reckoning be-

\*That, said Lenin, was not impossible. But a few months later he said emphatically that the victorious bourgeoisie might think they could do this, but they could not. The economic retrogression of Europe by political means would be a colossal, in fact, an impossible task. (Collected Works, XIX, p. 22.)

\*\*Those who want to use the fact that this did not happen are free to try. They should, however, think many times before they begin this type of argument.

tween themselves and the bourgeoisie who had tortured them so long. But it did more. It undermined the bankruptcy of the European bourgeois-democracies and posed for the European workers the question of a "planned economy," of state-ownership, of an end to private property. In all the voluminous writings of the retrogressionists, there has appeared no connected conception of all this, the fundamental Marxist analysis of the war. German defeat being on the order of the day, throughout 1943, the resistance movements all over Europe and Asia and in France and in Poland in particular, were elaborating a social program. Thus they were fundamentally peeing the question of class rule and state-power. Thus the masses showed as clearly as possible that they did not want any "democratic-political revolution." They wanted Fascism destroyed. But they wanted, in France for example, (1) a complete purge of the Administration so that the almost hereditary caste of officials who had betrayed France should be forever removed, (2) they wanted the property of the trusts, the banks and insurance companies "returned to the nation," (3) they wanted the old official army abolished and a new army based on the popular militia, (later the FFI, and the Maquis), (4) they wanted democracy.

It was, for any Marxist, a most moving experience to see the socialist future thus concretely and courageously emerging, as a result of the ruin and catastrophe of the bourgeois barbarist war. It was also in its way one of the most dramatic demonstrations of Marx's dialectical method that history has yet given us. For he is incapable of understanding revolution who does not see that what the proletariat in its empirical way was demanding was nothing less than the smashing of the bourgeois state-machine, the abolition of the bourgeois army, the substitution of collective property for bourgeois property and democracy, not bourgeois democracy but a democracy based on this overturn of the fundamentals of bourgeois society. That the democracy was not the democracy of the Third Republic they made clear by naming their new republic the Fourth Republic.

In the rest of Europe, the general situation was more or less the same; for example, more advanced in Poland, less in other countries. There is no space here to give evidence, but who wishes to deny this has my very warmest invitation to do so. The overwhelming majority of observers of Europe today report that the masses want the abolition of trusts, state ownership, plus democracy. That, in any language, even Stalinese, is socialism. Everybody knows this except those who wear retrogressionist spectacles.

#### The Counter-Revolution Takes Charge

The resistance leaders, and chiefly the Stalinists in every country, countered by promising socialism or at least, abolition of the trusts, in equivocal programs that meant one thing to the workers and something else to the writers. In France, for example, the dishonest program for socialism was combined with a relentless propaganda for a de Gaulle government. To the masses this government was represented as being determined to institute the new social order without delay. In March, 1944, the united French resistance movement endorsed a program which, twist and turn as it would, could not avoid the demand for the return of the great sources of wealth to the nation. And when workers with arms in hand say that, the question is posed in actuality and concretely related to the actions of the masses. After the "liberation" of France in August, 1944, the de Gaulle government, as in duty bound, sought to disarm the workers. Civil war, i.e., the socialist revolution, was averted only by a hair's breadth. The Stalinists accomplished it in 1944 in circumstances far more dangerous for bourgeois society than in 1936 when the workers were ready enough. Enjoying enormous prestige from the victories of Russia and their devoted work (on behalf of the USSR) in the resistance movements, they intervened, and one authority ought to be quoted here. Earl Browder in the *Daily Worker* of the United States defended his reactionary class-collaborationist policy in the U. S. by pointing to this notorious counter-revolutionary act in France. As he said complacently, "The facts are known." I hope they are. When Max Lerner returned from France, he reported the bitterness among some resistance leaders that they had missed the opportunity to create the new socialist order immediately on the expulsion of the German troops. Their self-criticism is not important. The thing is that social revolution was posed.

Since then the Consultative Assembly has repeatedly called on de Gaulle to nationalize the great industries, as he promised. Knowing that they are more terrified of the masses than he, he refuses. In May, 1945, on the morning of the municipal elections, the Socialist and Communist Parties issued a joint manifesto calling the de Gaulle government to fulfill the promise of the resistance program and nationalize the property of the trusts. Striving to stifle the revolution in France, these organizations and their resistance counterparts called a conference (which they had the impudence to call the States-General) for the week of July 14, 1945. Over 2,000 delegates attended. Chief result was an oath full of the most asphyxiating democratic verbiage. But there in the heart of it are the words "the fundamental rights of economic and social democracy... to wit... national economic sovereignty incompatible with the existence of private groups such as trusts, whose means of production and property must be restored to the national heritage." The Stalinists dared not leave it out. Many millions of French men and women have no doubt repeated and subscribed to that oath. The big bourgeoisie trembles for its property. That is the temper of France. The CGT has four and a half million members. The Stalinist Party and the Socialist Party are more powerful than ever they were in 1936. The phenomenon is European. Yet we are to believe that all this is the mark of a great historical retrogression of workers just emerging from slavery.

The proletarian masses all over Europe know and declare that political democracy is not enough. "Economic democracy" is their own phrase. So also is: the confiscation of wealth from the trusts which ruined and betrayed the nation. Since 1942 this has been their steady cry. In France the Popular Republican Movement, a Catholic organization and the great hope of the bourgeoisie, has come out for nationalization. All the moderate parties can only hold their own by raising the demand for nationalization. And it is since 1942 that the retrogressionists have declared for their "democratic-political revolution." For the past year they present the amazing spectacle of revolutionary socialists bringing to the front democracy while bourgeois and Stalinist parties win elections on popular leaflets demanding the abolition of trusts. While even counter-revolutionary parties can exist only by shouting nationalization (which for the workers means socialism), the vanguard of the vanguard sees the main task as the propaganda of democratic slogans owing to the historical retrogression.

#### Constituent Assembly, Bourgeois or Proletarian

I look back to more than a nodding acquaintance with our movement during the past hundred years. I cannot find its equal. And yet they can only get out of it by a radical break with the whole past of their theory and practice. From the moment they put forward their theory the retrogressionists were in an inescapable dilemma. Others have found themselves in it. In 1905 Lenin, facing a bourgeois-democratic revolution, posed this problem before his vacillating opponents. "And if we are in earnest in putting forward the practical demand for the immediate overthrow of the autocratic government, then we must be clear in our minds as to what other government we want to take the place of the one that is to be overthrown." (*Selected Works*, vol. III, p. 21.) The retrogressionists have never answered and to this day cannot answer this question. In France, in Holland, in Belgium, etc., they proposed to enter the resistance movements. They proposed seriously to take part in the overthrow of the Nazi or collaborationist governments. But "what other government" was to take its place? They had nothing to say, they could have nothing to say, owing to their great historical retrogression. Their "democratic-political revolution" was a revolution of a bourgeois type. The Stalinists and the rest knew what they wanted—a bourgeois government, and fought fiercely to get it. On this point the retrogressionists could not distinguish the French proletariat from the French bourgeoisie in the traditional manner of the Fourth International. Somehow the relation of bourgeoisie and proletariat in the process of production had altered. On this all-important question of a government—silence.

But maybe their slogan was "the democratic-political" slogan of a Constituent Assembly to decide the form of government. If anything could awaken the Marxist dead, this would. Half of Lenin's struggle against the Mensheviks in 1905 was over this very question of a Constituent Assembly. And this, mind you, was



a bourgeois-democratic revolution. Lenin did not object to the slogan as a slogan. He wanted a Constituent Assembly, but an "assembly which would have the power and force to 'constitute.'" He wanted a provisional revolutionary government. "By its origin and fundamental nature such a government must be the organ of the people's rebellion. Its formal purpose must be to serve as an instrument for the convocation of a national Constituent Assembly." But, and here the great revolutionary speaks, "Its activities must be directed toward the achievement of the minimum program of proletarian democracy." This program for Russia, 1905, was the destruction of Czarism, formation of a republic and abolition of feudal property. Lenin continued: "It might be argued that the provisional government, owing to the fact that it is provisional, could not carry out a positive program which had not yet received the approval of the whole of the people. Such an argument would be sheer sophistry, such as is advanced by reactionaries... and autocrats." (*Selected Works*, III, p. 51.) Compare this with the "democratic-political revolution." Its maximum demand was—restore democracy.

Trotsky in 1931 solved this problem for Spain by calling the Constituent Assembly a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly, thereby cutting it off at one stroke from the petty-bourgeois characters and fakers. He demanded that the Assembly itself confiscate the railways, mines, etc. No fooling the people with writing academic constitutions à la Weimar. The armed people should institute their government, and their assembly which would act. (This is not merely past history. Later I shall again expose the retrogressionist "Constituent Assembly" slogan.) But the fact remains that instead of boldly posing to the revolting workers, and peasants, in their factory committees, resistance committees, peasant committees, the formation of a government to carry out immediately—but to carry out what? There the retrogressionist thesis hung at their feet like a ball and chain. There was no feudal property. The only thing a revolutionary government could do was to drive out Pétain, institute a workers' government and seize the bourgeois property. But to say that meant the collapse of the whole retrogressionist thesis. So retrogression kept quiet.

Let us return to events. In Greece, for three whole days, the power lay in the streets. It could have been seized, big capitalists tried and shot, their property confiscated, with incalculable consequences for Eastern and all Europe. Revolutionists should have prepared the armed masses to seize precisely such an opportunity and to set themselves up as the government. As far as it could, retrogression said—retrogression, and when the British and Greek reaction massacred the Greek masses, said, "You see, we said so. Everything and everybody is retrogressive."

North Italy is perhaps the most striking refutation of retrogression. There, as we have seen, during the last months of the war, the workers had to be appeased by decrees (no doubt phoney but yet significant) which "socialized" industry. Great strikes shook the Northern provinces and the workers collaborated with armed partisans. I ask the retrogressionists. Wasn't it here that the revolutionaries should have said, "Remember Greece. See what de Gaulle and Pierrot are doing. At the first sign of German retreat we shall confiscate these factories, our resistance committees will deal with the Germans and the bourgeoisie and establish a workers' government?" But for the Stalinists, they would in all probability have done just that. As it was, not knowing that they were in a great retrogression they negotiated with Mussolini, executed numbers of fascists and capitalists, purged the government and, from the latest accounts, not only seized the factories but are still running them. Thereby they showed in practice what they thought of the "democratic-political revolution."

Innumerable examples can be given to show without any contention or doubt that the objective movement of events in Europe imposed upon the working masses both the need and the opportunity to seize state power. Historical development has placed objectively before the nation the necessity of leadership by the proletariat. This is the historical movement of our times—not retrogression. The "screwed-back development" and the "democratic-political revolution" are in no way substantiated by events.

#### Retrogression Today

The whole retrogressionist thesis compelled it to confine itself to the concept of the "democratic-political revolution," i.e., demand-

ing the restoration of the bourgeois-national state. The terrible thing is that this is their program for Europe today. Look at what they think of the contemporary European proletariat. "Political consciousness," they say, "lives only in... groups and individuals ('isolated and declimated propaganda groups,' i.e., a few hundred Trotskyists). (P. 240.) The European proletariat today has no political consciousness. Obviously, then, there is no use talking of socialism.

According to retrogressionist accumulation: "The proletariat has again, as formerly, become an amorphous mass, the characteristics of its rise and its formation have been lost." Just pause and contemplate for a few awed minutes the historic sweep of that statement. Who says A says B. "Before Europe can unite itself into 'socialist states,' it must first separate itself again into independent and autonomous states." The retrogressionists have no conception of revolutionary dynamics. They adhere to fixed and formal stages which have no application to contemporary Europe. Must Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland set up free and independent bourgeois states again before they can become socialist? Are we, the socialist revolutionaries of the twentieth century, to become sponsors of bourgeois states created by a "democratic-political revolution"? And, concretely, what Europe are these comrades looking at?

At Yalta and at Potsdam, an American, an Englishman and a Georgian living in Moscow settled the fate of all Europe. The rulers of the "independent," "autonomous" states, like you or me, read what these three Titans had for lunch, what music they listened to after dinner, and then learned their own fate in the lying communiqués. During World War I it was one of Lenin's basic arguments on self-determination that economic domination did not mean political domination. Today, and that is the new stage, economic and political domination go hand in hand. With trifling exceptions (e.g., Norway and perhaps Denmark), every single European government in existence was established by imperialist power, could not have been established without it and is maintained by it. Stalin maintains the bourgeois states in Eastern Europe. With the possible exception of France, Truman is responsible for the maintenance of every government in Western Europe. That is the new Europe. And today, we, the Marxists, are to call on the workers to revolt to substitute new bourgeois governments "independent" and "autonomous" in order then to prepare for socialism. There is a case where in the phrases of Blake, the embattled angels must throw down their spears and water heaven with their tears. For even they could not establish an independent bourgeois Poland! It would take a volume to show the ruin which the retrogressionists make of Marxism. For example, a bourgeois-"democratic-political" revolution in Poland? Which class is to lead it? The Polish bourgeoisie? In Greece, is the Greek bourgeoisie to lead the revolution against Britain? Is it? If, in France, the bourgeoisie moved from German fascism to Anglo-American imperialism, as it did, is there the slightest reason for thinking that any revolution anywhere in Europe would not have to fight against its own bourgeoisie which needs the protection of one imperialism or another? Are the workers so stupid as to be unable to understand the simple truth of Europe today? The proletariat must lead the revolution for national independence, so that the revolution must be a socialist revolution. The retrogressionist analysis of nations expropriating other nations drives them, by implication, to give a revolutionary rôle to the bourgeoisie which it is incapable of playing. This is where you land by tampering with the fundamentals of Marxism. The retrogressionists say with pride that now everybody repeats their thesis that Europe is Balkanized. What self-delusion! Everybody says exactly the opposite, that Europe is not Balkanized. Everybody sees that one power dominates Eastern Europe and one power or rather a major power and satellite dominate the other half. These comrades cannot see the difference between Versailles and Potsdam. Finally let us compare these bold innovations with the Marxism we still believe in. This was written during World War I by Trotsky:

"If the German armies achieved the decisive victory reckoned upon in Germany at the outset of the war, then German imperialism would doubtless make the gigantic attempt of a compulsory war tariff union of European states which would be constructed completely of preferences, compromises and heaps of every kind of outworn stuff in conformity with the state structure of present-



day Germany. Needless to say, under such circumstances, no talk would be possible of an autonomy of the nations, thus forcibly joined together as the caricature of the European United States. Let us for a moment admit that German militarism succeeds in actually carrying out the compulsory half-union of Europe, what then would be the cardinal formula of the European proletariat? Would it be the dissolution of the forced European coalition and the return of all peoples under the roof of isolated national state? Or the restoration of 'automatic' tariffs, 'national' coinage, 'national' social legislation, and so forth? Certainly not. The slogan of the European revolutionary movement would then be the 'cancellation of the compulsory, anti-democratic form of the coalition with the preservation and zealous furtherance of its foundations, in the form of the complete annihilation of tariff barriers, the unification of legislation and above all of labor laws. In other words, the slogan of the United Socialist Europe—without monarchy and standing armies—would under the foregoing circumstances become the unifying and guiding formula of the European revolution." (*Proletarian Revolution in Russia.*)

Trotsky never moved and never would have moved one inch from that. A few months before Stalin murdered him he wrote in the Manifesto: "The shifts in the battle lines at the front, the destruction of national capitals, the occupation of territories, the downfall of individual states represent from this standpoint only tragic episodes on the road to the reconstruction of modern society." Not historical retrogression to the Middle Ages but an episode on the road to socialism. After Stalingrad the masses saw it more or less that way too.

#### "The Unifying and Guiding Formula"

This is no thesis on Europe today. I have no space for that. But a few things have to be said, and Germany offers a more than excellent example. Here the proletariat, if anywhere, is "an amorphous mass." Here presumably we must have an "independent, autonomous state" before the struggle for socialism begins, and this, if you please, by a revolution. The retrogressionists presumably propose for Germany as the first slogan: withdrawal of the occupying armies. Good. Next. Freedom of press and right to organize. Agreed.

Now what next? Constituent Assembly? Constituent Assembly for what? That is the question. To have some more German professors write another Weimar Constitution? What do the retrogressionists mean by a "democratic-political revolution" for Germany? Do they mean the resurrection of a democratic German capitalism? Here is a new chance for you to clarify us, comrades. If Germany is to be free, then production must be free. Are Marxists to give the slightest countenance to the idea of capitalism once more being given free scope in Germany? We await your answer.

Marxism in Germany today demands withdrawal of occupying troops, right of free press and the right to organize. That has not one whiff of retrogression. But it demands today a revolutionary provisional government elected by the people to *destroy capitalism in Germany.* (And we might say boldly also that if the occupying armies were to withdraw tomorrow, we would summon the people to arm themselves and carry out this program in a revolutionary manner.) A superb slogan, of deep historical significance, has already come out of Germany. "Not National Socialism, but the Socialist Nation." This in the light of their dreadful past has meaning for all Germans. This is the appeal the German workers must make to Europe. This must be coupled with slogans embodying ideas such as: Do not take away the factories. Do not limit our production. Let us join the European working class in a new European socialist order.

Nothing else but this will counter the bourgeois propaganda that a free Germany means war once more. This is the way to pose now before the German people and the rest of Europe a unified Europe, the Socialist United States of Europe.

The retrogression thesis on Germany today, ridiculous as it is, merely continues its policy of yesterday. It is obvious that this thesis could see no sort of proletarian socialist revolution in Germany or Italy. There, in excelsis, the proletariat was "amorphous mass," etc. The European Trotskyist movement saw Germany as the key to the European situation and to its eternal credit and honor never for one moment drew back or equivocated on its belief in the capacity of the German workers to make a revolution

in the manner envisaged by Trotsky in 1928. The retrogressionists, however, in full accordance with their theory, obviously had abandoned the German revolution, even after the altogether magnificent revolution of the Italian workers, which should have wiped away all doubts about the recuperative power of the proletariat under fascism. For them the Socialist United States of Europe was no unifying slogan but a phrase. Their revolution in the occupied countries was "democratic-political." But the formation of factory committees and soviets for Germany or Italy, the beginning of the socialist revolution, as Trotsky envisaged it in 1938, that their conception of the proletariat did not allow them to see at all.

#### The Failure of the German Workers

The German workers failed to achieve a coordinated revolt. The exact reasons for this we do not know and doubtless before very long they will tell us for themselves. But this much the present writer has always believed and does not waver from it. After Stalingrad the German bourgeoisie was doomed. As the climax approached it was obvious that no class would be able to hold the German nation together except the proletariat. It has turned out that such was the destruction and ruin of Germany that the nation, including the proletariat, collapsed completely. Germany is held together today by occupying armies. But if tomorrow the occupying armies were to leave, the proletariat would, as in Italy, reassert itself with the utmost rapidity. Had there been a revolution in Germany, despite the fact that invading armies would have entered, the whole European situation would have been altered. Not only would the German proletariat have started with a clean slate in its own eyes. It would have won sympathy and support from the European workers at one stroke. And this revolution would have immensely altered the relation of forces in the hitherto occupied countries. As it is, the German failure hangs heavily not only over Germany, but over Europe also.

Churchill can write and Attlee sign at Potsdam with no reaction from British workers. The European workers are apathetic in regard to Germany. The conception of the Socialist United States of Europe did not get that final reinforcement from the German revolution. The German workers, in the popular mind, share the responsibility for Nazi crimes as the Italian workers do not.

The defeat hangs over us all, but on no revolutionary current does it hang so heavily as on the retrogressionists. What kind of defense can they make of the German workers today which would square with their theory of the "amorphous mass"? None that can hold water. They do not say that the German workers were fascist-minded, but all they can do is to apologize. Where the petty bourgeois democrats claim that the German workers must be educated for democracy, the retrogressionists claim that the German workers must be organized with democracy and educated for socialism. It is better, but not much better. For to this very day they consider the German workers incapable of a socialist proletarian revolution until they have passed through the school of democracy. They can only hold up before them their labor-camp revolution for democracy, the restoration of bourgeois society, of an "independent, autonomous" German bourgeoisie.

#### The Bourgeoisie and the Constituent Assembly

History repeats itself as farce, says Marx. It needs the pen of the *Eighteenth Brumaire* to describe the shameful farce that is being played around this slogan of Constituent Assembly in France today. France had a constitution, free elections and all the bag of bourgeois tricks—the hated Third Republic. Now de Gaulle proposes elections to decide whether France should have the constitution of 1875 over again or whether the newly elected body should be a Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution. The debate is rich. Two chambers or one? Will the executive have more power, as in the U. S., or will the cabinet be irremovable until a general election, as in Britain? Will we have proportional representation? Yes, say the socialists, *firmly, very firmly.* No, says some other party, *equally firmly.* Will Catholic schools be state-aided? And so on and so forth. This the professors will babble about for six months after October and then produce another Weimar Constitution in French. Then we shall prepare for some real constitutional elections. Meanwhile de Gaulle asks that during this time his government have the power. "No," says the Consultative Assembly, "you can have it, but—the Constituent Assembly in the

intervals of its constitution-writing will keep an eye on you and if it doesn't like what you are doing it will have the power to turn you out."

Was ever a device more patently calculated to do what do Gaulle has done for one year—do nothing, secretly consolidate his power inside the administration and outside it, and wait for the fatigue and disgust of the masses?\*

Can we summon up a little revolutionary imagination or rather memory and think how Marx, Engels, Lenin or Trotsky would have torn into this! Are Marxists to lend themselves to it? This is what we should say. ["We do not want any talking shop" (as Engels called the constitution-drafting assembly at Frankfurt in 1848.)] We do not want any Constituent Assembly to write any bourgeois constitution. We want a Revolutionary Provisional Constituent Assembly or a Revolutionary Provisional Government which will first and foremost arm the whole people in a national militia to ensure its own defense. We want it to carry out the program of the resistance and socialize the property of the trusts. We want it to appoint people's courts to complete the purge. We want the FFI and the Maquis to become the nucleus of a popular army. We want the representatives of the CGT, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the peasants' associations, the Radical-socialist Party, etc., to formulate a plan of economic action to save France from the present ruin. We want the workers in the factories to control production according to this plan. The planners and the workers will establish universal labor discipline to rebuild France. What we want is a second revolution.

"We propose freedom for the colonies and a joint economy with them. We propose the same to the British government. Europe can never recover as isolated states. Leave the German factories to the German workers. Atomic energy means that we in Europe shall live forever in terror and end by being blown to pieces unless we unite. A workers' France in a Socialist United States of Europe."

Concrete slogans are not my business here. But the above is what we should say. One cannot call today for workers' power. That opportunity was presented at the moment of the "liberation" and should have been prepared for. Today that would be madness. If an election for a nasty, stinking bourgeois Constituent Assembly should intervene, then most certainly we take part. But in the present period we link the concrete demands and concrete organizations to an incessant socialist propaganda. How long will it take before the masses mobilize for direct action? What a question! After World War I the general strike in France came in 1920. After November, 1918, in Germany the Kapp Putsch came in 1920, the March Action in 1921. Trotsky has more than once told us that but for the war the 1917 crisis in Russia would have been delayed for one or two years. Truman prepares to suppress "desperate men" this winter. We prepare by mobilizing the masses. Europe is ruined. It has to be rebuilt. Only the united efforts of the workers can rebuild it. History will take its course. That course will never be charted by those who believe that the European proletariat nowhere has any chances of seizing power in the course of the next five years. The revolutionary explosions may be delayed. They may come with striking suddenness and spread like a prairie fire. Trotsky wrote many times about this. Take up your copy of the *History* and read the first paragraph of Volume III, Chapter XI, page 250.

What is the retrogressionist view? We must, they say, study Lenin's writings in 1908 in order to know how to act in 1945. Here is the quintessence of retrogression. Lenin in 1908 was seeking to rebuild a movement and lift a proletariat which had just been defeated, after a tremendous revolution. For the retrogressionists, the would revolution has failed to come. No "if" here, and the proletariat is in ruins. In the "Materials for Revision of the Party Program," May, 1917, Lenin says that precisely because of "the enormous obstacles in the path of the economic and political struggles of the proletariat, the horrors of the imperialist war and the disaster and ruin caused by it, all these factors transform the present stage of capitalist development into an era of proletarian socialist revolution. That era has begun." May, 1917. Isn't it ten times worse today?

\*The actual word Constituent Assembly is not in question here. I would raise Trotsky's slogan the Revolutionary Constituent Assembly. In France the slogan of a Convention might have a tremendous historical appeal.

This was Lenin's perpetual cry in 1917. Russia is ruined. Europe is ruined. The ruin continues. The misery of the people grows. The only way out is by moving to socialism. What other way out is there today? We may have to go underground. We go. Messrs. Retrogressionists, hat in hand and on my knees, I beg of you. Tell us. Are you prepared to pose socialism to the European people today? If not, why not? And so that there can be no fooling, is your proposal this: That as the French proletariat is an "amorphous mass," lacking "political consciousness," all that we can do is to propose the "democratic-political" slogan of a Constituent Assembly to decide the form of bourgeois government, so that the masses might have time to be educated by the few politically-conscious people, the isolated and decimated Trotskyists? Again! Where do you stand on Italy? There the government does not overcome a crisis in order to function but functions solely by overcoming crises. Are the Italian workers such an "amorphous mass" so lacking in political consciousness that Marxists have in 1945 to shout for a democratic republic? Or do we tell them that nothing, nothing but the destruction of bourgeois property and their own class actions can save the nation from ruin? That will take care of the King? A famous observation of Trotsky during the Spanish revolution was that we fought willingly in Negrin's armies, but not even then would we sponsor the bourgeois republic or any of its works, even its budget for war against Franco. In India and colonial countries, says the Founding Conference, we tie together "indissolubly" the Soviets, the Constituent Assembly and agrarian reform, which means in reality agrarian revolution. In Europe today what do we tie indissolubly to the Constituent Assembly? Right of free press and right to organize or abolition of bourgeois property and workers' militia? But if you say abolition of bourgeois property and workers' militia, then where is the retrogression? The more one considers the retrogressionist theories, the more incredible they become. It seems that they are firmly convinced that absolutely the greatest mistake a revolutionary party in Europe can make is to say: "Form soviets, organize to overthrow bourgeois society. Only socialism can save us." You can sum up their whole thesis thus. Above all, no socialist agitation.

### The Role of the Party

The retrogressionists made a pronouncement which has caused a vast amount of confusion. The task they said and still say was to rebuild the labor movement. Whereupon proponents and opponents alike took this to mean labor parties, trade unions, co-operatives, etc. These were destroyed; obvious retrogression; therefore they had to be rebuilt. Socialism? Afterward. But, as it was so easy to foresee, the workers in many countries were rebuilding themselves even before the Germans got out. They did not consider themselves defeated as in Russia of 1908. They seized bourgeois printing houses and printed their papers. The CGT has four and a half million members. In Italy the CP and SP have a million and a half members between them.

Now the retrogressionists say that they did not mean the labor movement, social-democratic parties, etc. They meant scientific socialism—the revolutionary party. What a mess! But let that pass (for the time being). They say that since the treachery of the Stalinists in Spain (1938) there has been no revolutionary party. Isn't this pathetic? Since 1934 the Fourth International has as one of its basic doctrines that there was no revolutionary socialist party except ourselves. In 1935 Trotsky wrote in *Whither France?*

"But it is a fact that there is no revolutionary party in France." Yet in the same article he says: "Victory is possible! Comrades... the Bolshevik-Leninists summon you to struggle and to victory." (Page 117.) The Bolshevik-Leninists! Those were our few comrades in France. I doubt if they were more numerous than today. Today the cadres are certainly stronger. The whole thesis ends in a grandiose zero and multitudinous explanations. Push the retrogressionists on their "amorphous mass," they say "no labor movement." Push them on "the non-existence of the labor movement," they say "no party." Show them Trotsky and the small French party in 1934 onwards summoning the workers to socialist revolution, they say—*Christ only knows what they say.* We ask the retrogressionists: What is now about scientific socialism and the labor movement in France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Britain, since we declared for the Fourth International in 1934? What has happened to justify a new political orientation "because there is no

party"? They announce with a luxuriant verbiage that the task is to build the party. We are to link scientific socialism to the labor movement? Wonderful! How do you propose to do this? By giving classes? Or by teaching the workers to preserve democracy! As if the desperate class struggle will wait. What, comrades, do you think Trotsky was trying to do between 1934 and his death? What do you think he was doing in France when in the name of our little party he was putting forward the revolutionary socialist program and calling the workers to victory. Strange as this may seem to you, he was building the party, building it with a correct policy in the concrete circumstances. *He didn't ask history to wait while parties were being built.*

**Scientific Socialism and the Labor Movement**

In 1934 there was an armed clash in the streets of Paris. How did Trotsky meet it? All the retrogressionists should either read *Whither France?* or give away their copies. In March, 1935, seeing in the clash of 1934 bourgeois reaction and the instinctive socialist demands of the French proletariat, he writes: "The working masses understand what 'the leaders' do not understand, that under the conditions of a very great social crisis, a political-economic struggle alone, which requires enormous efforts and enormous sacrifices, cannot achieve any serious results." When was France ever in such a social crisis as today? When the great strikes broke out after the elections, Trotsky saw: socialist revolution. "When one and a half million voters cast their ballots for the Communists, the majority of them wish to say: 'We want you to do the same thing in France that the Russian Communists did in their country in October, 1917.'" Three months ago the CP had 900,000 members which today with the YCL and periphery organizations must make them almost equal to the votes of 1936. What have these people joined for? Because they have retrogressed into an "amorphous mass"? Or for Revolution? How are the Stalinists to be defeated? The people flock to them for revolution and we counter by saying: "They are counter-revolutionary. Come to us. We shall save you from the Middle Ages by democracy."

Trotsky calls for committees of action of striking workers and a congress of all the committees of action in France. "This will be the new order which must take the place of the reigning anarchy." (Page 148.) And seven pages later he calls for an organization to reflect the will, the "growing will" of the "struggling masses"—the Soviets of Workers Deputies. According to retrogressionist logic (today) all this was madness. Trotsky should have said: "The labor movement does not exist. It is divided between bourgeois parties, Stalinist and Menshevik. There is no party. We must struggle to maintain democracy until we once more have the labor movement linked to scientific socialism." Is this unfair? Then show me.

Thus the great revolutionary. What would we not give for ten lines, just ten lines, from his pen today?

This spinning out of empty theories about linking scientific socialism to the labor movement is the sum total of retrogressionist wisdom and its last refuge against the interminable contradictions in which it increasingly finds itself. It heaps all its mistakes upon the heads of the workers. In January, 1938, Trotsky wrote on Spain: *The Last Warning*. Of the Spanish revolution he says: "Throughout the six years its social setting was the growing onslaught of the masses against the régime of semi-feudal and bourgeois property."

Compare this and a thousand other statements like it with the retrogressionist analysis of the proletariat during the last forty years.

No man ever insisted upon the importance of the party with greater urgency than Trotsky. Yet he continues:

"The hounding of the Trotskyists, POUMists, revolutionary anarchists; the filthy slander, the false documents, the tortures in the Stalinist offices, the murders from ambush—without all this the bourgeois régime, under the republican flag, could not have lasted even two months."

Is this clear?

"The GPU proved to be the master of the situation only because it defended more consistently than the others, i.e., with the greatest baseness and bloodthirstiness, the interests of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat."

Compare this with the long list of lamentations of the retro-

gressionists, their view of the modern proletariat, their concentrated hostility to any idea of socialism as a living concrete alternative to capitalism. Europe seethes with ruin and unrest. Workers have hidden their arms. The main prop of bourgeois society is Stalinism, which opposes and demoralizes the revolutionary desires of the masses. How to meet it? Listen to Trotsky again:

"The renunciation of conquest of power inevitably throws every workers' organization into the swamp of reformism and turns it into a plaything of the bourgeoisie; it cannot be otherwise in view of the class structure of society."

Today, in the terrible crisis of Europe, with the workers looking for a way out, the retrogressionists renounce the bold posing of the socialist solution to the workers. For them the workers are defeated as in Russia of 1908. No, now is the time to remember the Lenin of 1905.

"Revolutions are the locomotives of history, said Marx. Revolutions are the festivals of the oppressed and the exploited. At no other time are the masses of the people in a position to come forward so actively as creators of a new social order as at a time of revolution. At such times the people are capable of performing miracles, if judged by a narrow Philistine scale of gradual progress. But the leaders of the revolutionary party must also, at such a time, present their tasks in a wider and bolder fashion, so that their slogan may always be in advance of the revolutionary initiative of the masses, serve them as a beacon and reveal to them our democratic and socialist ideal in all its magnitude and splendor, indicate the shortest, the most direct route to complete, absolute and final victory." (Vol. III, p. 123.)

Translated to today that means the socialist program. Of the retrogressionist thesis as applied to the United States, there is regrettably no space to speak. It is a credit to our movement that the retrogressionists are almost completely isolated among all currents which embrace the program of the Fourth International. It is only a matter of time before their theory and the ruinous politics which flow from it will only be an unpleasant memory. If, as appears from statements in their document, they should make any attempt to apply it to America, then its exposure in the American movement would only be swifter and surer.

J. R. JOHNSON.

September 10, 1945.

# The Nature of the Russian Economy

(In *Analysis of Russian Economy*,<sup>1</sup> which was made after an exhaustive study of all available data on the dynamics of the Five Year Plans, it was shown that the law of value dominated the Russian economy. This law expressed itself in two ways: (1) The production of means of production outdistances the production of means of consumption. (2) The misery of the workers increases, along with the increase in capital accumulation. No one has challenged this study based on official Russian documents, which, however, did not draw the inescapable conclusions. It is necessary, therefore, to draw fully and explicitly the conclusions implicit in the statistical analysis, which this author has always considered as Part I. of her study of the Nature of the Russian Economy.—F. F.

## Introductory—"A Single Capitalist Society"

The profound simplicity of Marx's method of analysis of capitalist society revealed that, given the domination of the law of value, which is a law of the world market, a given society would remain capitalist even if one or all of several conditions prevailed: (1) the exchange between the subdivisions of the department producing means of production were effected directly,<sup>2</sup> that is, without going through the market; (2) the relationships between the department producing means of production and the one producing means of consumption were planned so that no ordinary commercial crises arose; and, finally, (3) even if the law of centralization of capital would reach its extreme limit and all capital were concentrated in the hands of "a single capitalist or... a single capitalist society."<sup>3</sup>

Precisely because Marx analyzed a pure capitalist society which has never historically existed, his analysis holds true for every capitalist society, but only for capitalist society. What Marx was primarily concerned with was not the abstraction, "a single capitalist society." His concern was with the fact that this extreme development would in no way change the law of motion of that society. He made this abstraction a point of analysis because by it the limitations of any individual capitalist society could be seen more clearly. The only basic

<sup>1</sup> Published in *The New Internationalist*, Dec. 1942, Jan. and Feb. 1943. This series will hereafter be referred to as Part I.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Karl Marx: *Theories of Surplus Value*, (Vol. II, Part II, p. 170, Russian ed.). The debates on this question within the Marxist movement are dealt with by this author in her *Luxemburg's Theory of Accumulation* in *the N. I.*, April and May 1946.

<sup>3</sup> "In a given society, this limit [extreme centralization] would be reached if all social capital were concentrated into the same hands whether those of an individual capitalist or those of a single capitalist society." —Karl Marx: *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 692, Eden and Cedar Paul translation; in the Kerr edition this appears on p. 484.

distinction from the traditional capitalist society would be in the method of appropriation, not in the method or laws of production.

## RUSSIAN STATE CAPITALISM: A GIVEN SINGLE CAPITALIST SOCIETY

### I. The Mode of Appropriation

Since under the specific Russian state capitalism legal title to the means of production as well as the competitive market for such means have been abolished, how is appropriation achieved?

Inasmuch as private property in the means of production has been abolished in Russia, it is a deviation from the juridical concept to permit accumulation within any enterprise since the state aims to increase only "national capital." Nevertheless, with the establishment of "ruble control," enterprises were permitted to accumulate internally. In fact, incentives towards that interest in capital accumulation were created through the establishment of the Director's Fund. In 1940 internal accumulation comprised 32.5 per cent of capital investment!<sup>4</sup>

Because these agents of state capital do not have title to this accumulated capital, however, is production thereby governed by a different motive force?

### 1. Planning vs. the Average Rate of Profit

The Stalinists, in denying that Russia is a capitalist society, insist that the best proof of that is that Russia is not subject to "the law of capitalism: the average rate of profit."<sup>5</sup>

"The law of capitalism" is not the average rate of profit, but the decline in the rate of profit. The average rate of profit is only the manner in which the surplus value extracted from the workers is divided among the capitalists.<sup>6</sup> It is impossible to jump from that fact to the conclusion that "therefore" Russia is not a capitalist country. It is for this reason that the Stalinist apologists, with great deliberation, perverted "the law of capitalism" from the decline in the rate of profit to the achievement of an average rate of profit.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Part I, N. I., Jan. 1943.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. "Teaching of Economics in the Soviet Union" *American Economic Review*, Sept. 1944, p. 526.

<sup>6</sup> "A single capitalist, as is well known, receives in the form of profit, not that part of the surplus value which is directly created by the workers of his own enterprise, but a share of the combined surplus value created through the country proportionate to the amount of his own capital. Under an integral 'state capitalism', this law of the equal rate of profit would be realized, not by devious routes—that is, competition among different capitals—but immediately and directly through state bookkeeping."—L. Trotsky: *Revolution Betrayed*.

With this revision of Marxism as their theoretic foundation, they proceeded to cite "proof" of Russia's being a non-capitalist land: Capital does not migrate where it is most profitable, but where the state directs it. Thus, they conclude Russia was able to build up heavy industry, though the greatest profits were obtained from light industry. In other words, what the United States has achieved through the migration of capital to the most profitable enterprises Russia has achieved through planning.

Profit, moreover, does not at all have the same meaning in Russia as it does in classical capitalism. The light industries show greater profit not because of the greater productivity of labor, but because of the state-imposed turn-over tax which gives an entirely fictitious "profit" to that industry. In reality, it is merely the medium through which the state, not the industry, siphons off anything "extra" it gave the worker by means of wages. It could not do the same things through the channel of heavy industry because the workers do not eat its products. That is why this "profit" attracts neither capital nor the individual agents of capital. That is the nub of the question.

Precisely because the words, profit and loss, have assumed a different meaning, the individual agents of capital do not go to the most "profitable" enterprises, even as capital itself does not. For the very same reason that the opposite was characteristic of classic capitalism: The individual agent's share of surplus value is greater in heavy industry. The salary of the director of a billion dollar trust depends, not on whether the trust shows a profit or not, but basically upon the magnitude of the capital that he manages.

State capitalism brings about a change in the mode of appropriation, as has occurred so often in the life span of capitalism, through its competitive, monopoly and state-monopoly stages. The individual agent of capital has at no time realized directly the surplus value extracted in his particular factory. He has participated in the distribution of national surplus value, to the extent that his individual capital was able to exert pressure on this aggregate capital. This pressure in Russia is exerted, not through competition, but state planning. But this struggle or agreement among capitalists, or agents of the state, if you will, is of no concern to the proletariat whose sweat and blood has been congealed into this national surplus value.<sup>7</sup> What is of concern to him is his relationship to the one who performs the "function" of boss.

It is immaterial to the laborer, whether the capitalist pockets the whole profit, or whether he has to pay over a part of it to some other person, who has a legal claim to it. The reason for dividing the profit among two kinds of capitalists thus turns surreptitiously into reasons for the existence of surplus value to be divided, which the capital as such draws out of the process of reproduction, quite apart from any subsequent division."—Marx: *Capital*, Vol. III, 448.



## 2. Private Property and the Agents of Capital

It is neither titles to property nor motives of individuals that distinguishes different exploitive economic orders, but their method of production, or manner of extracting surplus labor. If it was the legal title to property that were basic, the Stalinists would be right in assuming, "Since there is no private property in Russia, there is no exploitation of man by man."

Behind the imposing façade of the "socialist economy," however, stands the "classless intelligentsia."<sup>8</sup> The specific weight of the upper crust of this ruling class, as we saw in Part I, comprises a mere 2.05 per cent of the total population!

The individuals who act as agents of the state and its industry are, of course, theoretically free to refuse to participate in the process of accumulation, just as a capitalist in the United States is free to sign away to the workers in his factory his legal title to the means of production. In the United States he would retire to Catalina Island, or, at worst, be sent to an insane asylum. In Russia he would be "liquidated." But he does not refuse. He acts exactly as the agent of capital that he is, as agent of the dead labor alienated from the worker and oppressing him. The class difference between the two, which the Russians euphemistically call "functional", is expressed outwardly, too, in no different manner than under traditional capitalism, where the one lives in luxury and the other in misery. It is true that in Russia the agent of capital does not "own" the factory. But personal property is recognized in the unlimited right to purchase interest-bearing bonds, sumptuous homes, *datchas*, and personal effects. State bonds, no matter how large the amount, are not subject to inheritance or gift tax. All forms of personal property can be left to direct descendants. Institutions of higher learning, the tuition fees of which make them inaccessible to the proletariat, welcome the children of these property-less factory directors, and this assures their offspring of good positions as befits the sons and daughters of the ruling class. This, however, is entirely incidental to the relationship in the factory.

It is not the caprice of bureaucracy nor the "will" of the individual capitalist in competitive capitalism that sets the wages of the workers. It is the law of value which dominates both.

The law of value, i.e., the law of motion, of the Russian economy has led to the polarization of wealth, to the high organic composition of capital, to the accumulation of misery at one pole and the accumulation of capital at the other. This is a given single capitalist society, an economy governed by the laws of world capitalism, originating in the separation of the laborer from control over the means of production.

But how could that arise when not only private property was abolished, but the capitalists were expropriated?

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Part I, *New International*, Feb. 1943.

## II. THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION (Emphasis 1935-1937)

Given, on the one hand, the environment of the world market, and, on the other hand, the failure of the advanced proletariat of Europe to make its revolution and thus come to the aid of the Russian proletariat, it was inevitable that the transitional stage between capitalism and socialism perish, and the law of value reassert its dominance. It is necessary, Lenin warned the last party congress at which he appeared, to examine squarely "the Russian and international market, to which we are subordinated, with which we are connected and from which we cannot escape."

The counter-revolution did not make a "formal" appearance, with arms in hand, and therefore it was hard to recognize it. Along with the bureaucratization of the apparatus and loss of political control over the state by the proletariat, the relations of production were undergoing a transformation. It was, in fact, the changing relations of production which laid the basis for the eventual consolidation of the bureaucracy as a class.

The initial changes in the relations of production appeared imperceptibly. The labor inspector failed to defend the workers' interests because, with the adoption of the First Five Year Plan, all enterprises became state enterprises and automatically were labeled "socialist." The leaders of the trade unions who displaced, first the Left Oppositionists, and then the Tomsky leadership, were all too ready to speak out against any "right wing unionistic tendencies" of those who put their welfare above those of the "socialist" economy. When, in 1931, the state told the worker he could not change his job without permission of the director of the plant in which he worked, the trade unions had to acquiesce. When the worker's ration card and his right to living space were placed in 1932 in the hands of the factory director, the trade unions hailed the step as a necessity for establishing "labor discipline." The Workers Production Conferences, established by the early workers state so that every worker "to a man" might participate in the management of the economy, seldom convened. In 1934 the trade unions were made part of the administrative machinery of the state.

But the final divorce of labor from control over the means of production could not be achieved merely by legal enactment, any more than the constitutional dictum that the means of production belonged to the "whole nation" could give the workers automatic control over them. Stalin saw early that the dual nature of the economy violently shook his rule, now to one extreme, now to the other. In his address to the directors of industry, he issued the slogan: "Let there be an end to depersonalization." This, translated in industrial terms, read, "Better pay for better work." "Better pay for better work" needed a foundation, a piecework system that could gain momentum only with such a momentum as Stakhanovism, which arose in 1935.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Part I (action on "Ending Depersonalization and Creating Stakhanovism"), N. I., Feb. 1943, pp. 53-54.

## 1. Stakhanovism and the Stalinist Constitution

The high organic composition of capital in advanced capitalist countries, which makes necessary a comparable technical composition in any single society, demands sacrifice in the sphere of the production of articles of mass consumption. That the resulting distribution of the scarce means of consumption is at the expense of the proletariat as a whole is only the "natural" result of value production. This, in turn, engenders a certain relationship which gives the impulse to the capitalistic movement of the economy. The "underconsumption" of the workers in a capitalist society is not merely a moral question. It is of the essence of Marxism, that once the workers are in that situation, the relationship of constant to variable capital moves in a certain direction. This is the hardest point for the petty bourgeois to understand.

The piecework system was declared by Marx to be best suited to the capitalist mode of production. The Stakhanovite piecework system was best suited to the mode of production prevalent in Russia. These record-breakers-for-a-day soon entered the factory—not through the back door, but through the front office—because they themselves occupied that front office. The politician bureaucrat found an "heir apparent" in this "production intelligentsia." Both groups soon fused to comprise the new "classless intelligentsia."

Stakhanovism made possible the development of a labor aristocracy. But not merely that. A labor aristocracy meant a better prop for the ruling clique. But not merely that either. No, as master over the production process, with Stakhanovism as a base and nourishing soil for "heirs" to bureaucrats, the bureaucracy began to feel the stability of a class. Feeling the stability of a class and having a source of reinforcement from the managers of industry, the bureaucracy moved headlong toward the juridical liquidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. To legitimize the counter-revolution against October, the new class needed a new constitution.

The Stalinist Constitution of 1936 recognized the intelligentsia as a special "group," distinct from workers and peasants. With this juridical acknowledgment of the existence of a new ruling class went the guarantee of the protection of state property form "thieves and misappropriators."

Moreover, the Constitution raised into a principle the Russian manner of payment of labor. The new slogan read: "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his labor." This seemingly senseless slogan is in reality only a method of expressing the valid capitalist law of payment of labor according to value. To guarantee the free functioning of this truly economic law, it became necessary to exterminate the remnants of the rule of October even if it were only in the memory of some men.

## 2. The Moscow Trials

The Moscow Trials of 1937 were the culminating point to the counter-revolution that we saw developing early in the changed

relations of production. A hangman's noose, rather than arms in hand, sufficed because only one of the parts to this conflict was armed. The October Revolution was exterminated and the proletarian state overthrown not only by the execution of the Old Bolsheviks who led it, but by clearing a place in the process of production for the new class. That place could have been cleared for that "classless intelligentsia" only when there existed such a class only where the method of production called it forth.

The Russian worker knows that the job of factory director is not, as the Russians put it euphemistically enough, merely "functional." The factory director behaves like a boss because he is a boss. The state bears no more resemblance to a workers' state than the president of the U. S. Steel Corp. does to a steel worker just because they are both "employees" of the same plant. The Counter-Revolution has triumphed.

Yet it was not the laws that caused the triumph of the counter-revolution. The accumulation of these laws only bears witness to the accumulation of changes in the role of labor in the Soviet state and in the process of production.

The Counter-Revolution is not the child, not even an illegitimate one, of "Bolshevism." The Counter-Revolution is the legitimate offspring of the "new" mode of production, out of Stalinism and fired by the imperialist world economy. It is this method of production, and not the legal enactments, that needs, above all, to be investigated. In this investigation we will find that, as in any capitalist economy, the two major contending forces are capital and labor.

### III. LABOR

"The economic laws of such a regime (state capitalism) would present no mysteries."—Leon Trotsky.<sup>10</sup>

The inner essence of the Marxian theory of value, and hence of surplus value, is that labor power is a commodity bought at value.

Up until 1943, the Soviet theorists had denied that the law of value, the dominant law of capitalist production, functioned in Russia where socialism had been "irrevocably established." In 1943, however, a startling reversal of this position was published in the leading theoretical journal of that country, *Pod Znamensom Marzizma*.<sup>11</sup> The authors of this article state that the teaching of political economy is being resumed after a lapse of several years, and offer the teachers rules to follow in their "teaching" of political economy. Even a superficial glance at the article reveals, however, that it is not the teaching that is being reversed, but the political economy taught.

The Stalinist ideologists affirm that the denial of the operation of a law of value in Russia has "created insurmountable difficulties in explaining the existence of such categories [as money, wages, etc.] under socialism." Now the admission that the law of value operates must bring with it the further admission that the law of surplus value operates. Like all apologists for ruling

classes, this admission they refuse to make. This then, is their dilemma, which does not concern us here.<sup>12</sup> What does concern us here is the admission that the law of value does in fact function in Russia, and that money is therefore the "price expression of value."

### 1. Value and Price

As in all capitalist lands, so in Russia, money is the means through which prices and wages are equated in the supply and demand for consumption goods, that is to say, the value of the worker is equal to the socially-necessary labor time that is incorporated in the means of subsistence necessary for his existence and the reproduction of his kind. So long as the production of means of consumption is only sufficient to sustain the masses, prices will irresistibly break through legal restrictions until the sum of all prices of consumption goods and the sum of wage payments are equal. Price-fixing in Russia established neither stabilization in prices of goods nor of wages. The abolition of rationing in 1935 brought about so great an increase in prices that the worker who had eked out an existence under the very low rationed prices, could not exist at all under the "single uniform prices." The state was therefore compelled to grant general increases in wages, so that by the end of the Second Five-Year Plan wages were 96 per cent above that planned.

The erroneous concept that because prices are fixed by the state, they are fixed "not according to the law of value, but according to government decision on 'planned production'"<sup>13</sup> falls to take into consideration the economic law that dominates prices. Even a casual examination of any schedule of prices in Russia will show that, giving consideration to deviations resulting from the enormous tax burdens on consumers goods, prices are not fixed capriciously and certainly not according to use-values, but exhibit the same differentials that prevail in "recognizably" capitalist countries, i.e., prices are determined by the law of value.<sup>14</sup>

### 2. Labor: "Free" and Forced

Time is of the essence of things in a society whose unit of measurement is socially-necessary labor time, whose mode of existence is enveloped in technological revolution, and whose appetite for congealed surplus labor is from its very nature insatiable.

<sup>12</sup> For an analysis of how they attempt to solve their dilemma, see commentary of Raya Dunayevskaya to the above article, published in same issue of *A. B. R.*, under title, "A New Revision of Marxian Economics." The attacks upon this from the Stalinist apologists in this country were published by that journal in the following three issues, and Dunayevskaya's rejoinder, "Revision or Reaffirmation of Marxism," appeared in the Sept. 1945 issue.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Kent in the *New Internationalist*, Oct. 1941.

<sup>14</sup> This has finally been admitted by the Stalinists. In the above cited thesis, they write: "Cost accounting, which is based on the conscious use of the law of value, is an indispensable method for the human management of the economy under socialism. Value of the commodities in a socialist (sic) society is determined not by the units of labor expended in its production, but upon the quantity of labor socially necessary for its production and reproduction."

The machine age has therefore passed this wisdom on to its trustees, the bourgeoisie: Use "free labor" if you wish the wheels of your production to turn speedily.

As if to prove that they are not "really" capitalists, the Russian rulers ignored this elementary wisdom and attempted to turn wage slaves into outright slaves through legislative enactment. At the lowest point of production in 1932 when the whole régime was tottering and labor was turbulently restless, a law was enacted which transferred the workers ration card into the hands of the factory director who had the right both to fire the worker and evict him from his home for even a single day's absence. This statute failed to fulfill the desired end. Labor would not come to industry and when it did come, it left soon, after producing as little as possible. Since industry needed labor the factory director "forgot" to fire the worker for absence and slowdowns in production. By 1933 the crisis in agriculture and consequent unemployment and actual famine caused such an inflow of labor to the city as to permit the managers of industry to discipline labor through "natural" bourgeois methods. What the reserve army of labor accomplished in 1933, the speed-up and piecework system of Stakhanovism accomplished in 1935.

These "natural" methods brought about natural results: the class struggle. The simmering revolt among the workers, which was ruthlessly crushed during the staging of the Moscow Trials, only produced further chaos in production and a mass exodus of the workers from the city. In 1938 the state grew desperate. The 1933 law was revived and "improved upon." This still proved fruitless. In 1940 came the creation of the State Labor Reserves, and with it came the institution of "corrective labor": workers disobeying the laws were made to work six months with 25 per cent reduction in pay.

Because the state is in their power, the rulers think that it is within their power to coerce labor by non-economic means to obey the needs of value production. Stagnation of production has resulted in restricting the free movement of workers. It has not achieved the increase in labor productivity required by constantly expanding production.

There is this constant pull and tug between the needs of production for highly productive labor which means "free" labor, and the resort to legislative enactment to bring this about in hot-house fashion. On the one hand, several million workers end up in prison camps as forced laborers. On the other hand, many are released back to join the "free" labor army. The phenomenon of "corrective labor" is the result of a compromise between the resort to prison labor, and the need to get some sort of continuous production right within the factory.

Labor, too, has shown ingenuity. Where it cannot openly revolt, it either "disappears," or so slows up production that in 1938 production was lower than in 1935! There have been periods when the rate of increase has been at a practical standstill, and all the while labor turnover continues to be very high.<sup>15</sup> So widespread were the

<sup>15</sup> See Part I (section on "The Workers and the Law"), *New Internationalist*, Feb. 1941, pp. 62-3.

<sup>10</sup> *Revolution Betrayed*, p. 245.  
<sup>11</sup> *Under the Banner of Marxism*, No. 7-8, 1943, Russian. For English translation see "Teaching of Economics in the Soviet Union" in the *American Economic Review*, Sept. 1944.

labor offenses during the war that the state has found that it must disregard its own laws if it wishes to have sufficient labor to begin to put the Fourth Five-Year Plan in effect. It has therefore declared a general amnesty for all labor offenders.

Thus while the state has found that it cannot by legal enactment transform wage slaves into outright slaves, the worker has found that he has the same type of "freedom" he has on the capitalist competitive market: that is, he must sell his labor power if he wishes to get his means of subsistence.

### 3. Unemployment and the Growing Misery of the Workers

Just as labor power being paid at value is the supreme essence of the law of value, so the reserve army of labor is the supreme essence of the law of the preponderance of constant over variable capital. The greater expansion of production, it is true, has meant the absolute increase in the laboring army, but that in no wise changes the fact that the law governing the attraction and repulsion of labor to capital is that of the decrease of living labor as compared to constant capital. It is for this reason that Marx called the unemployed army "the general absolute law of capitalist production."

In Russia unemployment has officially been abolished since 1930. In 1933, however, it was revealed, as the Russians so delicately put it, that "there are more workers in the shops than is necessary according to plans." The influx from the famished countryside was, in fact, so great that labor passports had to be introduced and anyone without a passport was not permitted to live in the large cities. Stakhanovism in 1935 and the gory Moscow frame-up trials in 1937 changed the picture in the opposite direction. There was a mass exodus from the city to the country. The 1939 census revealed that 67.2 per cent of the total population was rural, and that of the 114.6 million rural dwellers 78.6 millions were peasants. To find so overwhelming a percentage of the population in agriculture in the United States we would have to go back to a period before the American Civil War!

Russia is backward, but is it that backward? The productivity of labor there is very low, but is it that low? Or is it rather that the unemployed army hides out in the countryside? That the latter is the true situation was revealed by the "Great Leader" himself when, in announcing the creation of State Labor Reserves, he appealed to the kolkhozy for their surplus labor. "The kolkhozy have the full possibility," said Stalin, "to satisfy our request inasmuch as abundance of mechanization in the kolkhozy frees part of the workers in the country..."

It has been impossible for Russia, as it has for traditional capitalism, to avoid unemployment over a historic period, because this single capitalist society is straining every nerve to bring its plants to the level of the more advanced productive systems and the only way to do this is to use as little living labor as possible to produce as much value as possible. It is for this reason that Russian state capitalism has had to base its

entire calculation, not on the amount of labor time, as in a transitional society, but basically on wages, that is to say, upon the value of the worker. This has been further aggravated by the backwardness of the Russian economy so that we meet there the extreme condition to which Marx pointed in Volume III of *Capital*.<sup>17</sup> In order to obtain sufficient surplus value to increase production, part of the agricultural population receives payment as a family unit.<sup>18</sup>

The conditions of the workers have constantly deteriorated. Since the initiation of the Five-Year Plan, the real wages of the workers, as I have shown in part, have declined by half! That is not at all accidental. It is the inevitable consequence of the law of motion of that economy which had resulted in so high an organic composition of capital. Accumulation of misery for the class that produces its products in the form of capital necessarily flows from the accumulation of capital.

### IV. CAPITAL

Capital, said Marx, is not a thing, but a social relation of production established through the instrumentality of things. The instrumentality which establishes this exploitive relationship is, as is well known, the means of production alienated from the direct producers, i.e., the proletariat, and oppressing them. The capitalist's mastery over the worker is only the "mastery of dead over living labor." The material manifestation of this greater preponderance of constant over variable capital is the preponderance in the production of means of production over means of consumption. In capitalist society it cannot be otherwise for the use values produced are not for consumption by workers or capitalists, but by capital, i.e., for productive consumption or expanded production. The greater part of the surplus value extracted from the workers goes back into this expanded production.

The Russian exploiters are so well aware of the fact that surplus value, in the aggregate, is uniquely determined by the difference between the value of the product and the value of labor power, that the Plan for 1941 stipulated openly that the workers are to get a mere 6.5 per cent rise in wages for every 12 per cent rise in labor productivity. "This proportion between labor productivity and average wage," brazenly proclaimed Voznessensky, "furnishes a basis for lowering production cost and increasing socialist (!) accumulation and constitutes the most important condition for the realization of a high rate of extended production."<sup>19</sup>

#### 1. The Production of Means of Production at the Expense of the Production of Means of Consumption.

The huge differential between labor productivity and labor pay goes into expanded

production at a stupendous rate. According to Voznessensky, the Chairman of the State Planning Commission, 152.6 billion rubles were invested in plant and capital equipment from 1939 to 1940. Of the entire national income in 1937, 26.4 per cent was expended in capital goods. The plan for 1942 had called for an estimated 28.8 per cent of the national income to be invested in means of production. Some idea of the rate at which production goes into capital goods in Russia may be gained from the fact that in the United States, during the prosperous decade of 1922-1932, only 9 per cent of the nation's income was utilized for expansion of means of production.

At the time the Plans were initiated, the production of means of production comprised 44.3 per cent of total production, and production of means of consumption 55.7 per cent. By the end of the First Plan, this was reversed, thus: means of production, 52.3 per cent; means of consumption, 46.7 per cent. By the end of the Second Five-Year Plan, the proportions were 57.5 per cent to 42.5 per cent. By 1940 it was 61 per cent means of production to 39 per cent means of consumption. This is true of contemporary world capitalism.

The slogan "to catch up and outdistance capitalist lands" was the reflection of the compelling motive of present world economy: who will rule over the world market? Therein lies the secret of the growth of the means of production at the expense of means of consumption. Therein lies the cause for the living standards of the masses growing worse despite the "state's desire" for what it called "the still better improvement of the conditions of the working class."

The fundamental error of those who assume that a single capitalist society is not governed by the same laws as a society composed of individual capitalists lies in a failure to realize that what happens in the market is merely the consequences of the inherent contradictions in the process of production. A single capitalist society does not have an illimitable market. The market for consumption goods, as we showed, is strictly limited to the luxuries of the rulers and the necessities of the workers when paid at value. The innermost cause of crisis is that labor, in the process of production and not in the market, produces a greater value than it itself is.

But wouldn't it be possible to raise the standard of living of the workers (not of some Stakhanovites, but of the working class as a whole) if all capital is concentrated in the hands of the state?

What a grand illusion! The moment that is done, the cost of production of a commodity rises above the cost of the surrounding world market. Then one of two things happens: Production ceases because the commodity cannot compete with the cheaper commodity from a value-producing economy, or, even though the society insulates itself temporarily, it will ultimately be defeated by the more efficient capitalist nations in the present form of capitalist competition which is total imperialism.

Our specific single capitalist society has achieved some highly modern factories, and a showy subway, but it has not stopped to raise the living standards of the masses of workers. It cannot. Capital will not allow it. Because of this the economy is in constant crisis.

<sup>16</sup> The same type of "freedom", Franz Neumann shows, existed for the German worker in Nazi Germany. Cf. his *Behemoth*.

<sup>17</sup> p. 273.  
<sup>18</sup> Earning statistics are "per peasant household." Population statistics "per family unit" held hide child labor. Cf. Part I, *New Internationalist*, Feb. 1943.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. "The Growing Prosperity of the Soviet Union," by N. Voznessensky.

## 2. Crises, Russian Brand

The value of capital in the surrounding world is constantly depreciating which means that the value of capital inside the capitalist society is constantly depreciating. It may not depreciate fully on the bureaucrats' books. However, since the real value of the product can be no greater than the value of the corresponding plant on the world market, the moment the Ford tractor was put alongside the Stalingrad tractor, the state had to reduce the price of its own brand. This was the case in 1931 when Russia, while importing 90 per cent of the world's production of tractors, sold its own below cost.

However, of greater importance—and therein lies the essence of Marx's analysis of all economic categories as social categories—is the fact that, no matter what values may appear on the books, the means of production in the process of production reveal their true value in their relationship to the worker. That is to say, if an obsolete machine was not destroyed but continued to be used in production, the worker suffers the more since the overlord of production still expects him to produce articles at the socially-necessary labor time set by the world market.

As long as planning is governed by the necessity to pay the laborer the minimum necessary for his existence and to extract from him the maximum surplus value in order to maintain the productive system as far as possible within the lawless laws of the world market, governed by the law of value, that is how long capitalist relations of production exist, no matter what you name the social order. It has thus been absolutely impossible for Stalin, Inc. to guide the productive system without sudden stagnation and crises due to the constant necessity of adjusting the individual components of total capital to one another and to the world market. He has avoided the ordinary type of commercial crises. But on the other hand, when the crisis came, they were more violent and destructive. Such was the case in 1932. Such was the case in 1937. And one is brewing now.

The Fourth Five-Year Plan is being initiated in the midst of a new purge wave, at a time when the country has suffered a loss of 25 per cent of capital equipment on the one hand, and of 25 million homes on the other. And, towering above all these now that "peace" has arrived, is the need to keep up with the latest and greatest discovery of atomic energy. All this keeps the Russian economy in a constant state of turmoil. Behind this turmoil is the law of value, and hence of surplus value, which cause world capitalism in decay to writhe. If this law, in its essence and in its essential manifestations, is dominant also in Russia, what kind of society can it be but capitalist?

## PART II

Trotsky dismissed the idea that Russia might be a state capitalist society on the ground that, although theoretically such a state was conceivable, in reality:

"The first concentration of the means of production in the hands of the state to occur in history was achieved by the proletariat

with the method of social revolution and not by capitalists with the method of trustification."<sup>20</sup>

It is true, of course, that historically state property appeared as workers' state property, but that is no reason to identify the two, and in no way justifies Trotsky's transformation of that historic fact into a theoretic abstraction.

### 1. History and Theory

In the early years of existence of the Soviet state, Lenin fought hard against those who, instead of looking at "the reality of the transition," had tried to transform it into a theoretic abstraction. In the trade union disputes with Trotsky<sup>21</sup> Lenin warned the latter not to be "carried away by... abstract arguments" and to realize that it was incorrect to say that since we have a workers' state, the workers primary concern should be with production. Lenin insisted that the workers had a right to say:

"...you pitch us a yarn about engaging in production, displaying democracy in the successes of production. I do not want to engage in production in conjunction with such a bureaucratic board of directors, chief committee, etc., but with another kind."<sup>22</sup>

We must not forget, Lenin continued, that "All democracy, like every political superstructure in general (which is inevitable until classes have been abolished, until a classless society has been created) in the last analysis serves production and in the last analysis is determined by the production relations prevailing in the given society."<sup>23</sup>

This stress on the primacy of production relations in the analysis of a social order runs like a red thread through all of Lenin's writings, both theoretically, and in the day-to-day analysis of the Soviet Union. In his dispute with Bukharin on the latter's *Economics of the Transition Period*, he strenuously objected to Bukharin's assumption that the capitalist production relations could not be restored and therefore his failure to watch the actual process of development of the established workers state. Where Bukharin had written: "Once the destruction of capitalist production relations is really given and once the theoretic impossibility of their restoration is proven..." Lenin remarked: "Impossibility" is demonstrable only practically. The author does not pose dialectically the relation of theory to practice."<sup>24</sup>

So far as Lenin was concerned, the dictatorship of the proletariat, since it was a transitional state, could be transitional "either to socialism or to a return backwards to capitalism," depending upon the historic initiative of the masses and the international situation. Therefore, he held, we

20. *Revolution Betrayed*, pp. 247-8

21. Trotsky's position does not, unfortunately, exist in English. It can be found in Russian, along with all other participants in the dispute, including Shlyapnikov, in: *The Party and the Trade Unions*, ed. by Zinoviev. Lenin's position has been translated into English and can be found in his *Selected Works*, Vol. IX, to which work we refer.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

24. Lenin's Remarks on Bukharin's *The Economics of the Transition Period* (in Russian, in his *Leninski Sbornik*, No. 11).

must always be aware that (1) internally there was "only one road... changes from below; we wanted the workers themselves to draw up, from below, the new principles of economic conditions"<sup>25</sup>; and (2) externally, we must never forget "the Russian and international markets with which we are connected and from which we cannot escape." All we can do there is gain time while "our foreign comrades are preparing thoroughly for their revolution."

After the death of Lenin, Trotsky himself was the first to warn against the possibility of the restoration of capitalism. Not only did he insist that an unbridled continuance of the NEP would bring about the restoration of capitalism "on the installment plan," but even after private concessions were abolished and national planning instituted, he mercilessly castigated the Left Oppositionists who used this as a reason to capitulate. He subscribed to Rakovsky's statement:

"The capitulators refuse to consider what steps must be adopted in order that industrialization and collectivization do not bring about results opposite to those expected... They leave out of consideration the main question: what changes will the Five-Year Plan bring about in the class relations in the country."<sup>26</sup>

Rakovsky saw that the conquests of October would not remain intact if economic laws were permitted to develop by any other plan than one in which the workers themselves participated, for only the proletariat could guide it into a direction advantageous to itself. That is why he warned prophetically that a ruling class other than the proletariat was crystallizing "before our very eyes." The motive force of this singular class is the singular form of private property, state power."<sup>27</sup>

This clarity of thought and method of analysis were buried in the process of transforming statified property into a fetishism.

### 2. The Fetishism of State Property

Trotsky continued to speak of the possibility of a restoration of capitalist relations, but it was always something that might or would happen, but not as a process evolving "before our very eyes." The reason for this is two-fold: Firstly, the counter-revolution in Russia did not come in the manner envisaged by the founders of the proletarian state. That is, it came neither through military intervention, nor through the restoration of private property. Secondly, the victory of fascism in Germany presented a direct threat to the Soviet Union. Thus precisely when history demonstrated that statification of production can occur by counter-revolutionary means as well as by revolutionary methods, the concept of statified property=workers state was transformed into a fetishism!

We did call for the formation of new proletarian parties everywhere, including Russia. But our break from the past was not clean-cut. Our turn was stopped short by the elaboration of a new theory, to wit, that the building of a proletarian party aiming for power in Russia aims, not for social, but

25. *Selected Works*, Vol. VII, p. 277.

26. *Opposition Bulletin*, No. 7, 11-12/29, Russian.

27. *Ibid.*, No. 17-18, 11-12/30.



only for political power.

Like all fetishisms the fetishism of state property blinded Trotsky from following the course of the counter-revolution in the relations of production. The legitimization of the counter-revolution against October, the Stalinist Constitution, Trotsky viewed merely as something that first "created the political premise for the birth of a new possessing class." As if classes were born from political premises! The macabre Kremlin purges only proved to Trotsky that "Soviet society organically tends toward the ejection of the bureaucracy!"<sup>28</sup> Because to him Stalinist Russia was still a workers' state he thought that the Moscow Trials weakened Stalinism. Actually, they consolidated its rule.

The dilemma created by continuing to consider Russia a workers' state is not resolved by calling the bureaucracy a caste and not a class. The question is: what is the role of this group in the process of production? What is its relationship to the workers who operate the means of production? Calling the bureaucracy a caste and not a class has served as justification for remaining in the superstructural realm of property. This has only permitted exploiters to masquerade as mere plunderers. How far removed is that from the petty bourgeois concept that the evils of capitalism come not from the vitals of the capitalist system, but as a product of "bad capitalists"?

In her struggle against reformism, Luxemburg brilliantly exposed what the transformation of the concept of capitalist from "a category of production" to "the right to property" would lead to:<sup>29</sup>

"By transporting the concept of capitalism from its productive relations to property relations, and by speaking of simple individuals instead of speaking of entrepreneurs, he [Bernstein] moves the question of socialism from the domain of production into the domain of relations of fortune—that is, from the relation between Capital and Labor to the relation between poor and rich."

Trotsky, on his part, substitutes for analysis of the laws of production, an analysis of the distributive results. Thus he writes: "The scarcity in consumers goods and the universal struggle to obtain them generate a policeman who arrogates to himself the function of distribution."<sup>30</sup>

But what produces the "scarcity of consumers goods"? It is not merely the backwardness of the economy since the same backwardness has not prevented Russia from keeping, approximately, pace with advanced capitalist lands in the production of means of production. The relationship of means of production to the means of consumption, characteristic of capitalism generally, including Russia, is: 61:39. That, and not the "scarcity of consumers goods" is the decisive relationship. That is so because this relationship is only the material reflection of the capitalist's domination over the laborer through the mastery of dead over living labor.<sup>31</sup>

28. In Defense of Marxism, p. 13.

29. Reform or Revolution, pp. 31-32.

30. In Defense of Marxism, p. 7.

31. The whole dispute on Marxist fundamentals within our party has centered precisely on this relationship. Cf. the following

To Trotsky, however, the existence of nationalized property continued to define Russia as a workers' state because, to him, "the property and production relations established by October" still prevailed there.

Which relations: production or property? They are not one and the same thing. One is fundamental, the other derivative. A property relation, which is a legal expression of the production relation, expresses that relationship, sometimes correctly and sometimes incorrectly, depending upon whether the actual production relationship has been validated by law. In periods of revolution and counter-revolution, when the actual production relations undergo a transformation while the legal expressions are still retained in the laws, production relations cannot be equated to property relations without equating revolution to counter-revolution!

The Marxian law of value is not merely a theoretic abstraction but the reflection of the actual class struggle. The correlation of class forces in Russia in 1917 brought about the statification of production through the method of proletarian revolution. But, as Engels long ago noted, statification in and by itself, "does not deprive the productive forces of their character of capital":

"The more productive forces it [the modern state] takes over, the more it becomes the real collective body of all the capitalists, the more citizens it exploits. The workers remain wage-earners, proletarians. The capitalist relationship is not abolished; it is rather pushed to an extreme. But at the extreme it changes into its opposite. State ownership of productive forces, is not the solution of the conflict, but it contains within itself the technical conditions that form the elements of the solution."<sup>32</sup>

Neither the particular method of achieving statification—socialist revolution—nor the creation of the "technical conditions which form the elements of the solution" to the conflict of capital and labor could assure the real abrogation of the law of value, once the Russian Revolution remained isolated. However, the isolation of the Russian Revolution did not roll history back to 1913. Just because the bourgeois revolution was accomplished by the proletariat who proceeded to make of it a socialist revolution, the bourgeois revolution, too, was accomplished with a thoroughness never before seen in history. It cleared away centuries-old feudal rubbish, nationalized the means of production and laid the basis for "the technical conditions" for socialism. Hence the power of Russia today.

However, socialism cannot be achieved except on a world scale. The socialist revolution is only the beginning. The greater and more arduous task of establishing socialist relations of production begins after the conquest of power. That task, as the leaders of October never wearied of stressing, cannot be accomplished within the confines of a single state. Without the world revolution, or at least the revolution in sev-

Workers Party Bulletin: Production for Production's Sake by J. R. Johnson; The Mystification of Marxism by J. Carter; and A Re-statement of Some Fundamentals of Marxism by F. Forest.

32. Anti-Duhring, pp. 112-2.

eral advanced states, the law of value reasserts itself. The new "technical conditions" began to dominate the Russian laborer, once he lost whatever measure of control he had over the process of production. In this unforeseen manner, Marx's theoretic abstraction of "a single capitalist society" became a historic reality.

Since then Germany had achieved the statification of production through fascist methods; Japan through totalitarian methods began its Five-Year Plans. Both these methods are the more recognizable capitalist methods of achieving the extreme limit of centralization. Since World War II Czechoslovakia has achieved statification through "democratic" means. No one, we trust, will call it a "workers' state," degenerate or otherwise. What then happens to the identification of statified property with workers' statism? It falls to the ground. So false to the roots was that method of analysis of the nature of the Russian state and the policy of unconditional defensism which flowed from it that it led the Man of October to call for the defense of Russia at a time when it was already participating in an imperialist war as an integral part of it!

### 3. Bureaucratic Imperialism and Bureaucratic Collectivism

The counter-revolutionary role of the Red Army in World War II has shaken the Fourth International's theory of Russia. A break with the policy of unconditional defense was made inevitable. But how explain the imperialist action of the Army of a "workers' state," though degenerate it be? Daniel Logan searches seriously for the answer:

"However," he writes, "the Stalinist bureaucracy manages the Soviet economy in such a way that the yearly fund of accumulation is greatly reduced... Thus, the bureaucracy finds itself forced, lest the rate of accumulation fall to a ridiculously low level or even become negative, to plunder means of production and labor power, everywhere it can, in order to cover the cost that its management imposes on Soviet economy. The parasitic character of the bureaucracy manifests itself, as soon as political conditions permit it, through imperialist plundering."

His explanation has all the earmarks of confinement within Trotsky's theory of Russia as a workers' state bureaucratically managed. The error in it reveals most clearly that it is not so much an error of fact as an error in methodology. It is not true that the yearly fund of accumulation is greatly reduced; on the contrary, despite usual periods of stagnation, it is growing. Within the stifling atmosphere of degenerated workers' statism, however, it was natural to identify the decrease in the rate of accumulation with the decrease in the yearly fund because to grasp clearly the distinction between the two would have meant to be oppressively aware of the fact that decrease in the rate of accumulation is characteristic of the whole capitalist world. It is a result, not of the bureaucratic management of the economy, but of the law of value and its concomitant tendency of the rate of profit to decline.

It is not "the parasitic character of the bureaucracy" that causes the decline any

more than the growth in the rate of accumulation in the early stages of world capitalism was caused by the "abstinence" of the capitalists. The present world decline, which is the reflection of the falling relation of surplus value itself to total capital, is a result of what Marx called "the general contradiction of capitalism." This general contradiction, as is well known, arises from the fact that labor is the only source of surplus value and yet the only method of getting ever greater masses of it is through the ever greater use of machines as compared to living labor. This causes at one and the same time a centralization of capital and a socialization of labor; a decline in the rate of profit and an increase in the reserve army of labor.

The decline in the rate of profit brings to the overlords of production the realization that the method of value production carries within it the germ of its own disintegration and sends them hunting for "counter-acting measures." They plunge into imperialism, go laboriously into statification of production, or into both. Imperialist plundering is just as much caused by the objectives of value production.

Trotsky left the Fourth International a dual heritage: the Leninist concept of the world proletarian revolution and a Russian position which contained the seeds of the present dilemma and disintegration. The Fourth International, trapped in his Russian position, wishes to escape its logical political conclusions, but wishes to do so without breaking with Trotsky's premises. That, it will find, is impossible.

Trotsky always insisted that the virtue of the nationalized economy was that it allowed the economy to be planned. The adherents of Trotsky's defensism continue to see in the perpetual degeneration some progressive element of planning. Others who have broken with defensism (including both those who expound the theory of bureaucratic imperialism on the one hand, and bureaucratic collectivism on the other hand), still remain prisoners of Trotsky's basic method of analysis. This method, in fact, paved the way for bureaucratic collectivism, although Trotsky himself considers it a theory of "profoundest pessimism."

Basing itself upon Trotsky's characterization of nationalized property as progressive, the Workers Party has labelled Russia a bureaucratic collectivist society, a part, though mongrelized, of "the collectivist epoch of human history."<sup>33</sup> To this collec-

33. The official party position on bureaucratic collectivism, along with the Carter-Garrett position on it, as well as the Johnson position on state capitalism, are all included in *The Russian Question*, a documentary compilation issued by the Party's Educational Department. The party thesis, written by Shachtman, states: "Bureaucratic collectivism is closer to capitalism so far as its social relations are concerned, than it is to a state of the socialist type. Yet, just as capitalism is part of the long historical epoch of private property, bureaucratic collectivism is part—as unforeseen, mongrelized, reactionary part, but a part nevertheless—of the collectivist epoch of human history. The social order of bureaucratic collectivism is distinguished from the social order of capitalism primarily in that the former is based upon new and more advanced form of property, namely, state property. That this new form of property—a conquest of the Bolshevik revolution

tivism has now been added the concept of "slave labor" as the mode of labor characteristic of the bureaucratic collectivist mode of production.

What is the relation of this "slave labor" to the economic movement of this "new" society? What social development would lead these "slaves" to revolution? What distinguishes them from capitalist proletarians, in, say, a fascist state? What are the problems (if any), of accumulation?

All these questions remain unanswered, and indeed it would be difficult to make any coherent theory of a social order which is part of the collectivist epoch of human society but rests on slave labor. Beginning with their theory as applicable only to Russia, some of the proponents of bureaucratic collectivism now threaten to cast its net over the whole of modern society. This could only end, as Trotsky pointed out, in the recognition that the "socialist program, based on the internal contradictions of capitalist society ended as a Utopia." Bureaucratic collectivism has forced those Fourth Internationalists who have broken with defensism to hold on nevertheless to the concept of degenerated workers' statism, on the ground that out of the monstrous society "nothing new and stable has yet come out." It is true that nothing "new and stable" has yet come of the Stalinist society but that is not because it is still a degenerated workers' state. But because Stalinist Russia is part of decadent world capitalism and is destined for no longer life span than world capitalism in its death agony.

Our analysis has shown that Soviet planning is no more than a brutal bureaucratic consummation of the fundamental movement of capitalist production toward statification. As Johnson wrote in the International Resolution presented to the last convention of the party in the name of the Johnson Minority, with which this writer is associated:

"The experience of Stalinist Russia since 1936 has exploded the idea that planning by any class other than the proletariat can ever reverse the laws of motion of capitalist production. Planning becomes merely the statified, instead of the spontaneous submission to these laws. . . . Stalinist Russia, driven by the internal contradictions of value production, i.e., capitalist production, has defeated Germany only to embark upon the same imperialist program, reproducing in peace the economic and political methods of German imperialism, direct annexation, looting men and material, formation of chains of companies in which the conquering imperialism holds the largest share."<sup>34</sup>

The only section of the Fourth International that has been able clearly to emerge from Trotsky's method of analysis of the Russian state has been the Spanish section

—is progressive, i.e., historically superior, to private property is demonstrated theoretically by Marxism and by the test of practice." (This resolution has also been printed in *The New Internationalist*, October 1941, p. 228.)

34. Cf. *Bulletin of the Workers Party*, Vol. 1, No. 11, April 27, 1945. It contains also the official party position on the International Situation.

35. Cf. *Los Revolucionarios ante Rusia y el Stalinismo Mundial*, published by Editorial Revolucion, Apartado 2942, Mexico, D. F.

in Mexico. G. Munis, the leader of that section, has come out in his recent pamphlet,<sup>35</sup> squarely for the analysis of Russia as a capitalist state. His economic analysis may not be adequate, but in his attempt to grapple with the problem of planning in terms of the categories, c. v. s., and the social groups which control them, he has made the decisive step of breaking with the concept of degenerated workers statism and initiating within the Fourth International the development of a theory adequate to the analysis of Stalinist totalitarianism and the present stage of world development.

The Johnson Minority has successfully corrected the false Russian position of Trotsky by revising it in terms of the Leninist-Trotskyist analysis of our epoch. For us the Russian experience has made concrete the fundamental truth of Marxism, that in any contemporary society there can be no progressive economy, in any sense of the term, except an economy based on the emancipated proletariat. Proletarian democracy is an economic category, rooted in the control over production by the workers. So long as the workers are chained by wage slavery, the laws of capitalism are inescapable.

The Fourth International does grievous harm to the very doctrine of socialism when it teaches that a society can be progressive with labor enslaved. It handcuffs itself politically as well as organizationally in the task of gaining leadership of the European proletarian movement.

Statified property equals workers state is a fetishism which has disoriented the whole Fourth International. If in the early stages of the war when the impulse of revolution seemed to come from the march of the Red Army, there was some shred of excuse for a political policy which disoriented the movement and led to its being split, by what rhyme or reason can the Fourth International justify the position that revolutionists must "tolerate the presence of the Red Army"<sup>36</sup> at a time when Stalinism proved to be the greatest counter-revolutionary force in Europe? To tolerate the presence of the Red Army in Europe is to doom the European revolution to be still-born!

The recent turn in the position of the Fourth International, calling for the withdrawal of all occupation armies, including the Red Army,<sup>37</sup> is the first necessary step in the right direction. But it is only the first, and a very halting and belated step it is, precisely because it has been arrived at empirically and not through a fundamental understanding of the class nature of the Russian state. It is high time to take stock, to reexamine not merely the policy flowing from the false theory of the class nature of the Russian state, but to reexamine the theory itself. It is the urgent pre-requisite for rearming the Fourth International and making it possible for it to take its rightful place as the vanguard of the world revolutionary forces.

F. FOREST.

36. *Fourth Internationalist*, June 1946.

37. *Ibid.*, Aug. 1946.

# After Ten Years

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No one will deny that *The Revolution Betrayed* contains all that Trotsky thought essential to an understanding of Stalinist Russia as a new form of society. In reviewing this timely reprint<sup>1</sup> I propose to re-examine Trotsky's basic analysis of Stalinist production; the role of the working class in the labor process; the social functioning of the bureaucracy.

According to Trotsky, the distinguishing feature of the economy is the capacity to plan owing to the existence of State Property. Apart from the general problem of backwardness, its main defect is the incompetence of the bureaucracy. The fundamental content of the activity of the Soviet government is the struggle to raise the productivity of labor. (p. 79) The bureaucracy claims that the Russian workers lack skill, but the Russian worker is "enterprising, ingenious and gifted." (p. 83) "The difficulty lies in the general organization of labor." And the responsibility for this lies with the bureaucracy. "The Soviet administrative personnel is, as a general rule, far less equal to the new productive tasks than the worker." Productive organization of piecework demands "a raising of the level of administration itself, from the shop foreman to the leaders in the Kremlin." (p. 84) "The bureaucracy tries fatally to leap over difficulties which it cannot surmount." Again: "Not knowing how, and not being objectively able, to put the regime of production in order in a short space of time..." (p. 84) In conclusion: "... the name of that social guild which holds back and paralyzes all the guilds of the Soviet Economy is the bureaucracy." (p. 85)

In regard to the workers Trotsky's main preoccupation is the relation between their wages and the wages of the bureaucracy. It is important to recognize the enormous emphasis and space which Trotsky gives to *consumption* in his analysis of "inequality" and "social antagonisms." What lies, he asks, at the bottom of the continuous repression? His reply is: "Lack of the means of subsistence resulting from the low productivity of labor." (p. 62) He returns to it again and again. "The justification for the existence of a Soviet State as an apparatus for compulsion lies in the fact that the present transitional structure is still full of social contradictions, which in the sphere of *consumption*—most close and sensibly felt by all—are extremely tense, and forever threaten to break over into the sphere of production..."

"The basis of bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption with the resulting struggle of each against all..." Trotsky, of course, is no anarchist. He justifies a certain amount of inequality by the necessity for bourgeois norms of distribution in a transitional régime. This also justifies the state. The gravamen of his charge of betrayal of the revolution is the monstrous *growth* of the state and the monstrous *growth* of inequality.

He claims in more than one place that the economy is slowly bettering the position of the toilers. But the future of Soviet society depends upon the world revolution. Either the world revolution enables the Russian proletariat to liquidate the usurpations and incompetence of the bureaucracy, or the

<sup>1</sup> *The Revolution Betrayed* by Leon Trotsky. Pioneer Publishers, New York. 308 pp. \$2.00.

## On Trotsky's "The Revolution Betrayed"

further rule of the bureaucracy will lead to a complete liquidation of the conquests of the revolution. Such in brief is Trotsky's economic analysis. The problem of accumulation as such receives no direct treatment and this is not accidental. After the most scrupulous analysis of which he is capable, the present writer finds that Trotsky operates on the principle that once private property is abolished there is no *problem* of accumulation.<sup>2</sup> If waste and bureaucracy are kept down to a minimum, progressive accumulation is assured. *It is impossible to read this book and learn from it what, if any, is the specific contribution of the proletariat to the building of the socialist society.*

### Marx's Theory of Society

Such a difference of view involves the very concepts of Marxian thought. I propose, therefore, to state what in my view is the Marxian conception of society, capitalist, socialist and transitional to socialism, and then to show, in my opinion, Trotsky's sharp and consistent departure from this conception.<sup>3</sup>

Marx's theory of society is a theory of the activity of men, of men as active in the process of production. The classical economists, having discovered labor as the activity which produces private property, *left it alone* and proceeded to deal only with the material results of this activity. They did not analyze the nature of the activity nor the relationship of the results of the activity to the activity itself. Thus they viewed the movement of society and the division of society according to the division of the products of labor. Marx, on the contrary, based his analysis on the division of labor itself. His philosophy was a philosophy of the activity of men in the labor process. His analysis of capitalist production was therefore the analysis of the labor of man. In capitalism, labor was *alienated from its true function*, the development of man. Thereby it was transformed into its opposite, man's increasing subjugation—and rebelliousness. For Marx, therefore, the essence of private property was the alienation of labor and not the fact that property belonged to private individuals.

Marx states categorically that to see private property as the basis of alienated labor is to turn the truth upside down.

We have, of course, achieved the concept of alienated labor (of alienated life) from political economy as the result of the movement of private property. But in analyzing this concept, it is revealed that if private property appears as the basis as the cause of alienated labor, it is rather a consequence of it, as the gods are not originally the cause but the effect of human confusion of understanding. Later this relationship is turned upside down.

The handing over of his products to another, his alienation, is for Marx the result of his degraded labor, of the type of activity to which the proletariat is condemned. "How could the laborer be opposed to the product of his activity in an alien fashion if he were not estranged in the act of production itself? The product is only the résumé of activity, of pro-

<sup>2</sup> Other writings show the same thought.  
<sup>3</sup> While agreeing with many of the arguments used by Comrade Johnson against Trotsky's theory that Russia is a "degenerated workers state"—above all the central point that political control by the workers is essential—we do not accept those arguments that proceed from Johnson's position that Russia is a capitalist state and therefore subject to analysis on the basis of the same economic laws that apply under capitalism.—Editors.

duction... In the alienation of the object of labor is only crystallized the alienation, the renunciation in the activity of labor itself." Marx believed that this was his special contribution to the analysis of society. He says magnificently: "When one speaks of private property one thinks he is dealing with something outside of man. When one speaks of labor one has to do immediately with man himself. The new formulation of the question already involves its solution."

The result of this alienation of man from the product of his labor is that "his labor is therefore not free but forced, forced labor." That is to say, his labor is not his own free self-activity, the conscious exercise of all his powers, but merely a means to his existence. Secondly, an immediate consequence of this alienation of man from self-activity is the alienation of man from man. Capitalist society was the highest stage of alienation yet reached. As a result it carried to the highest possible stage the contradictions and hypocrisies of all previous class societies.

Alienation of labor corrupted society through and through. The greater the alienation, the greater the necessity of using all manifestations of society, science, art, politics, as a justification for the alienation. The solution is in what Marx calls the appropriation by the proletariat of the enormous possibilities for self-development existing in the objectified labor, the mass of accumulated capital. Man must become universal man, universal in the sense that the *individual* develops all his own *individual* powers in accordance with the stage of development of the species, that is to say, the potentialities embodied in the accumulated mass of productive forces.

The powers of man as an *individual* is the test. "Above all, one must avoid setting the society up again as an abstraction opposed to the individual. The individual is the social entity. The expression of his life... is therefore an expression and verification of the *life of society*."

The most vital expression of the life of the individual is his activity in the labor process. For Marx, it is labor which distinguishes man from the beast. Labor is the truest essence of man. By that he lives and develops himself as a truly social being. But in capitalist society his labor is an inhuman degradation. We have the result that man, the laborer, "feels himself as freely active more in his animal functions, eating and drinking, procreating," whereas in labor, his specifically human function, he functions more like an animal. "The animal becomes the human and the human the animal."

Marx's philosophy is not one thing and his economics and politics something else. His analysis of capitalist production, of accumulation, of consumption, flow from this philosophical concept of man in society with which he began. The quotations above are from his early economic and philosophical manuscripts. *Capital* and the writings of his maturity are only the embodiment and concretization of these ideas. The difference between these conceptions and Trotsky's conceptions of Stalinist Russia can be seen immediately in the analysis of Russia itself.

#### Stalinist Society and Alienated Labor

Where in modern society is there so perfect an example of alienated labor and its consequences as in Stalinist Russia? Trotsky after page upon page about wages and consumption suddenly states late in his volume the following: "The transfer of the factories to the State changed the situation of the workers only juridically." In other words, in the labor process he was left just where he was. First, this is not true. And if it were a whole new world begins. But to continue: "... In order to

raise [the low] level [of technique and culture], the new state resorted to the old methods of pressure upon the muscles and nerves of the workers. There grew up a corps of slave drivers. The management of industry became super-bureaucratic. The workers lost all influence whatever upon the management of the factory."

This is the situation of the proletariat today in production. What is there new or socialist in this? How does the mode of labor of the worker in Stalinist Russia differ from the alienated labor of the worker in capitalist production? Trotsky points out similarities. The differences, if any, and their importance, are outside of his consideration.

Failing to base himself upon the alienation of labor in the process of production, Trotsky fails to see the consequence of this upon the bureaucracy itself. Of what theoretical validity is his constant emphasis upon the incompetence of the bureaucracy? The Soviet bureaucracy is a reflection of the law of motion of the Soviet economy. The bureaucracy has no free will. It consumes more than the proletariat. But its social life within itself is a form of jungle existence. No member of the bureaucracy, except perhaps Stalin, knows whether tomorrow his whole life may not be cut short and he himself and all his family, friends and assistants disgraced, murdered or sent into exile. The various strata of the bureaucracy address each other in the same tone and manner as the bureaucracy as a whole addresses the proletariat. If the proletariat is imprisoned in the factories, the members of the ruling party are subjected to a regimentation, and unceasing surveillance and inquisition that make the coveted membership in the party a form of imprisonment. The Stalinist official, from the highest to the lowest, excludes his wife and family from any participation not only in his public or political life but even in his thinking. It is a measure of protection so that when the arm of the NKVD falls upon him, they will be able to say with honesty that they knew nothing about his political ideas. That is their slender hope of salvation. Friendship is a permanent suspicion. The risk of betrayal by one chance word is too great. This catalogue of crime, fear, humiliation, degradation, the alienation from human existence of a whole class (or caste), is the fate of those who benefit by the alienation of labor. As for the proletariat, at least a third of the labor force is an industrial reserve army herded in concentration camps. That is the Stalinist society, rulers and ruled. It is the ultimate, the most complete expression of class society, a society of alienated labor.

In socialist society or in a society transitional to socialism, politics, science, art, literature, education all become or are in process of becoming truly social. The *individual* is able to exercise his gifts to the highest capacity, to become truly universal, because of the essentially *collective* life of the society in which he lives. Look at Stalinist society. No individual is more "political" than the individual in Stalinist society. Nowhere are art, literature, education, science, so integrated with "society." That is the appearance. In reality, never before has there been such a prostitution of all these things for the corruption and suppression of the direct producer, with the resulting degradation of the producers and managers alike. From what aspects of Marxian theory is it possible to call this barbarism a part of the new society envisaged by Marx as emerging from the contradictions of capitalist society? But a false analysis of the social role of the proletariat in society is always either cause or effect of a false analysis of the proletariat in the process of accumulation.



**Trotsky, the Proletariat and Accumulation**

Now let us see what role Trotsky gives to the proletariat. He says, for example, that for the regulation and application of plans, two levers are needed: "the political lever, in the form of a real participation in leadership of the interested masses themselves, a thing which is unthinkable without Soviet democracy; and a financial lever," a stable rouble. But when he concretizes leadership of the interested masses, we find that he is referring to the interest of the masses in the quality of products in so far as it affects their consumption.

"The Soviet products are as though branded with the gray label of indifference. Under a nationalized economy quality demands a democracy of producers and consumers, freedom of criticism and initiative." (p. 276) This is no casual statement. It comes in the chapter "Whither the Soviet Union?" where he is summarizing his position. On the previous page he had made it less sharp but more revealing. State planning, he writes, brings to the front "the problem of quality," bureaucratism destroys the creative initiative and the feeling of responsibility without which there is not, and cannot be, qualitative progress" (p. 275). Then comes what is, perhaps, the most astonishing statement in the book, from the point of view already enunciated: "The ulcers of bureaucratism are perhaps not so obvious in the big industries, but they are devouring, together with the cooperatives, the light and food producing industries, the collective farms, the small local industries—that is, all those branches of economy which stand nearest to the people" (p. 275). So that Trotsky finds that there is more "bureaucratism" in light industry than in heavy.

We want to leave no misunderstanding whatever in the minds of the reader as to our fundamental principled opposition to this analysis by Trotsky of bureaucracy and the relation to it of the proletariat and production. In "The State and Revolution," Lenin states: "Under capitalism democracy is restricted, cramped, curtailed, mutilated by all the conditions of wage-slavery, the poverty and misery of the masses. This is why and the only reason why (emphases mine—J. R. J.) the officials of our political and industrial organizations are corrupted—or, more precisely, tend to be corrupted—by the conditions of capitalism, why they betray a tendency to become transformed into bureaucrats, i.e., into privileged persons divorced from the masses and superior to the masses.

"This is the essence of bureaucracy, and until the capitalists have been expropriated and the bourgeoisie overthrown, even proletarian officials will inevitably be "bureaucratized to some extent."

But even when the capitalists have been expropriated and the bourgeoisie overthrown, the essence of bureaucracy can remain or recur owing to the cramped, curtailed, mutilated life of the masses. But whence comes this cramping, this curtailment, this mutilation of the life of the masses? Is this a question of consumption and quality of goods? Or of light and heavy industry? Is it necessary to quote again Marx's famous summation of hundreds of pages on the worker in heavy industry and the General Law of Capitalist Accumulation when he says that "be his payment high or low," the accumulation of capital leads on the part of the worker to accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation? (Capital, Vol. I, p. 709.) But production in Stalinist Russia is not capitalist? Very well. Let the followers of Trotsky's theory demonstrate that accumulation of misery, agony of toil, etc., in the production mechanism of the Workers' State, the state of planned economy, let them demonstrate

that that is not "the reason and the only reason" why the officials of the political and industrial organizations of Stalinist Russia become corrupted and transformed into privileged persons, divorced from the masses and superior to them. Trotsky's conception of the term "bureaucracy" is not ours.

**Marx, the Proletariat, and Accumulation**

Twenty-five years after he had written the early manuscripts, Marx stated in Capital that it was a matter of life and death for society to change the degraded producer of alienated labor into universal man. Presumably this was only philosophy. It would be interesting to have a symposium as to what interpretations a body of Marxists would give to the following: "Modern industry, indeed, compels society, under penalty of death, to replace the detail-worker of today, crippled by life-long repetition of one and the same trivial operation, and thus reduced to the mere fragment of a man, by the fully developed individual, fit for a variety of labors, ready to face any change of production, and to whom the different social functions he performs, are but so many modes of giving free scope to his own natural and acquired powers." (Capital, Vol. I, p. 534.) Life and death for society! Marx did not use such words lightly. Here he uses them twice on a single page. To the extent that one accepts this passage, one is penetrating to the heart of the Marxian theory of society and the theory of accumulation. Marx was the last man in the world to base such a conception of universal man upon anything but the economic necessities of society.

It is to be understood that the degradation (and the revolt) is inherent in capitalist accumulation, or if you prefer, in the accumulation of Modern Industry where labor is alienated. In his analysis of machinery and modern industry, Marx points out that the "special skill of each individual insignificant factory operative vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity before the science, the gigantic physical forces, and the mass of labor that are embodied in the factory mechanism and, together with that mechanism, constitute the power of the 'master.'" (Capital, Vol. I, p. 462.) Let the 1946 theoreticians of the degenerated Workers' State show that this gigantic bureaucratic mechanism in Russia confronts the individual worker with economic and political consequences other than those of capitalism.

The bureaucracy uses the old methods of pressure upon the worker. It is the greatest error of Trotsky that he nowhere in his book seems to find it necessary to answer (1) that the old methods of pressure are rooted in the relations of the expropriated pauperized proletarians to accumulated labor; (2) that this relation determines the economic movement. The present writer, as is known, believes that Stalinist Russia is a form of State Capitalism. He has no wish to hide that in this article, nor could he do so if he tried. But the fact remains that the desperate struggle for the productivity of labor, today at least, and for some years now, compels the bureaucracy to pay the individual proletarian at his value. From this follow certain economic consequences. The raising of the level of productivity, according to Trotsky the fundamental content of the Soviet government, can be accomplished in only one way, expansion of the mass of accumulated labor, decrease of the relative quantity of living labor. I submit that expansion in the degenerated Workers' State is governed by the amount of surplus labor at its disposal after all the necessary expenses have been met. Now Marx's thesis, in the analysis of capitalist production, was that at a certain stage, the increased surplus

labor which was necessary for the continued expansion and development of society on new foundations could be met only by entirely new perspectives of productivity. These could be opened up only by the proletariat, appropriating the mass of accumulated labor and using it to develop its own potentialities. Thereby it elevated the whole social system to a new level. But just so long as the proletariat continued in the stage of degradation, so the ruling class, bureaucracy or bourgeoisie, caste or class, would be compelled to raise productivity "by the old methods of pressure." Precisely because of this, the contradiction between the relatively decreasing labor force and the resultant increase in the mass but the fall in the rate, of surplus labor, becomes the theoretical premise of economic collapse. The greater the degeneration of the Workers' State the more powerful the functioning of this law.

**Trotsky, Consumption and Production**

What, in Trotsky's analysis, is the relation between consumption and production in Russia? This is his *solitary* reference; "Superficial theoreticians can comfort themselves, of course, that the distribution of wealth is a factor secondary to its production. The dialectic of interaction, however, retains here all its force." The dialectic of interaction! This fundamental problem he dismisses with a phrase. But immediately goes on to make the tremendous statement: "The destiny of the state-appropriated means of production will be decided in the long run according as these means of personal existence devolve in one direction or another." The future of planned economy then depends on consumption. Then follows a characteristic analogy of a ship declared collective property but whose first class passengers have "coffee and cigars" and the third class passengers nothing. "Antagonisms growing out of this may well explode the unstable collective." (p. 239)

Equally unfortunate is his treatment of the thesis that Russia may be a form of state capitalism. He admits (and no educated Marxist would dare to deny), the theoretical possibility of an economy in which the bourgeoisie as a whole constitutes itself into a stock company and by means of the state administers the whole national economy. "The economic laws of such a régime would present no mystery." Good. But then he proceeds to analyze the law of the average rate of profit which concerns the *distribution* of the surplus value among the capitalists. That is no problem. The relevant law is the law of the falling rate of profit. The problem is whether the national economy would be able to overcome the contradiction between the necessity of lessening and lowering the relative consumption of wage labor and at the same time accumulating sufficient surplus labor to continue the increase of expansion. Today, 1946, it is no longer a theoretical problem.

**"In Accordance With a Plan"**

In a society of alienated labor, that is to say, in a society of such low productivity as compels the antagonisms of alienation, the idea of a planned economy is a fiction. The Soviet State undoubtedly was the first to distribute capital to those spheres of production which expansion especially required. In so doing it led the world. But today, 1946, isn't it perfectly obvious that no capitalist society distributes capital any longer according to the sphere of greater profit? Planning is merely a form of rationalization. Monopoly capitalism was progressive in relation to individual capitalism. But it grew out of the contradictions of individual capitalism. It was a capitalistic method of attempting to solve those contradictions and merely sharpened them. In the same way planning today, without the

emancipation of labor, arises out of the contradictions of monopoly capitalism and, like all rationalization, is a more highly developed and refined form of exploitation, not lessening but increasing unbearably all antagonisms. How is it possible to plan socially when society is torn as it is by alienated labor and all the economic, political and social contradictions flowing from it? When Marx says that production by "freely associated men" will be "consciously regulated" by them in accordance with "a settled plan" he means literally and precisely that. The plan is the *result* of the freedom of individuals in society. No plan of bureaucrats, class or caste, can create anything else but chaos and crisis. As long as a section of society other than the proletariat controls the surplus labor, the plan can become the greatest calamity that can befall human society.

Trotsky once asked Shachtman "Does Shachtman wish to say in relation to the U.S.S.R. that the state ownership of the means of production has become a brake upon development and that the extension of this form of property to other countries constitutes economic reaction?" (*In Defense of Marxism*, p. 124.) This writer replies unhesitatingly "Yes." "*In relation to the U.S.S.R.*," in 1940 and in 1946, state-ownership in the Soviet zone in Germany, in Poland, in Yugoslavia, and wherever else it is instituted, is reactionary in all aspects, economic and otherwise. There is no economic progressiveness in totalitarianism. The complete degradation of labor cannot be in any circumstances progressive. It cannot raise the productivity of labor, the fundamental criterion, except by the old methods of pressure. And it is precisely because class society cannot do otherwise that all state ownership will end either in totalitarianism or social revolution.

This false conception of "plan" permeates the thought of Trotsky, but particularly in his later years. In 1938 he wrote "The disintegration of capitalism has reached extreme limits, likewise the disintegration of the old ruling class. The further existence of this system is impossible. The productive forces must be organized in accordance with a plan." (*In Defense of Marxism*, p. 8.) The formulation is characteristic and characteristically false. Once the question is posed that way, of necessity the second question then arises "Who will accomplish this task—the proletariat or a new ruling class of 'commissars'..." But the problem is not to organize the productive forces "in accordance with a plan." The problem is to abolish the proletariat as proletariat and release the creative energies of hundreds of millions of men suppressed by capitalism. Released from capitalist degradation they can plan. The guiding party, the administration or superintendence, the state, must be the *expression* of the free producers. These cannot be the expression of the need for the productive forces to be organized in accordance with a plan. The proletariat is the most important part of the productive forces. To say that these must be organized in accordance with a plan merely makes the proletariat a part of the plan. On the contrary the plan is a part of the proletariat, but of the proletariat emancipated.

Trotsky understood as few men have ever done the creative power of the proletariat in revolution. But the full, the complete significance of the creative power of the proletariat in the construction of the socialist economy always eluded him. In the Trade Union dispute, crucial for any understanding of Russian developments, Lenin told Trotsky: "Comrade Trotsky's fundamental mistake lies precisely in that he approached... the very questions he himself raised, as an administrator." He told him again: "It is wrong to look only to the elected

persons, only to the organizers, administrators, etc. These, after all, are only a minority of prominent people. We must look to the rank and file, to the masses." (*Selected Works*, Vol. IX, pp. 5-80.) Fifteen years after, the same error which Lenin attacked so fiercely and to which he referred in his testament, appears almost unchanged in "The Revolution Betrayed." The approach is in essence administrative. For many years Trotsky led a profound and brilliant opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy despite his fundamentally false theoretical orientation. But a false theory always takes its toll in the end. It is taking toll of our movement today. Finally a word to those who think that this conception of the role of the prole-

tariat belongs to some distant future after the good bureaucrats have organized production "in accordance with a plan" and raised the level of the masses. It is necessary to refer these vulgar materialists and sceptics to Trotsky himself who quotes and wholeheartedly approves Lenin's statement that the masses must begin to institute the new regime on the day after the revolution. That they will do, but they will need leaders and the leaders must begin with the concepts of the new régime clearly in mind.

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