

THE INEVITABILITY OF SOCIALISM  
AND THE LAWS OF MOTION OF CAPITALIST SOCIETY

A Reply to Comrade Gates

By F. Forest

I. The Dialectical Method

Com. Gates has found it necessary to take issue with the final section of my Outline of Capital, entitled the "Law of Motion of Capitalist Society." By the time he reaches the conclusion of his criticism, he declaims:

"It would be an exceedingly sad day for our movement, if its younger, inexperienced, and not-yet educated elements, were to be educated with this kind of 'historical materialism', and in the spirit which gives rise to it."

What, may I ask, is the "spirit" which engenders my allegedly distorted view of historical materialism? Com. Gates's zeal to save the youth and the "not-yet-educated elements" in the party from "a foolish error which is exactly contrary to Marxian dialectical thought and method" is commendable, but isn't he "butting it on rather thick"? In any case, since I fail to understand all the implications in Com. Gates's reference to the "spirit" which has caused me to present Marxism as Hegelianism, I shall proceed to handle more tangible things.

I wrote: "It is because Marx based himself on the inevitability of socialism that he could discern the law of motion of capitalist society, the inevitability of its collapse."

I had added, further, that it was this concept of the inevitability of socialism that gave Capital its profundity, force and direction. Since Com. Gates does not quote this final statement that followed the above quotation, I do not know his view of it. But Com. Gates leaves no doubt at all that he considers the above quotation "pure idealism," from which would flow the conclusion that, had Marx not based himself on the concept of the inevitability of socialism, he would have been unable to perceive the inevitability of capitalist collapse. "Yet, actually," concluded Gates, "it was because Marx discerned 'the law of motion of capitalist society, the inevitability of its collapse,' that he was able to affirm the 'inevitability' of socialism."

Reread the above statement and you will see that what is involved here is nothing less than the whole method of dialectical materialism. Com. Gates's interpretation of the method of historical materialism transforms dialectics into the sheepest kind of empiricism. He evidently thinks that one is scientific if one discerns, and then predicts; the discernment arises out of contemplation over assembled data.

Unfortunately, using a similar point of departure, the bourgeois and petty bourgeois critics of Marx proved, to their own satisfaction, that Capital is an unscientific work because Marx had believed in socialism long before he gathered data about the economic organism of

capitalism. Revolutionary marxism, on the other hand, asserted that had Marx not based himself on the inevitability of socialism, he could not have discerned the law of capitalist collapse; he would have been unable to get out of the web of capitalist phenomena to perceive its contradictory essence. In this age of atom-smashing, must we really go back to a conception of science which is so narrow as to bury the dialectic in the debris of pragmatism?

Let me refresh Com. Gates's memory with Rosa Luxemburg's revolutionary defense of the historic concept of the inevitability of socialism as a prerequisite to a scientific analysis of capitalism:

"What precisely was the key which enabled Marx to open the door to the secrets of capitalist phenomena and solve, as if in play, the problems that were not even suspected by the greatest minds of classic bourgeois political economy?" asked Luxemburg in her Reform or Revolution. "It was his conception of capitalist economy as an historic phenomenon--not merely in the sense recognized in the best of cases by the class economists, that is, when it concerns the feudal past of capitalism--but also in so far as it concerns the socialist future of the world," she answered, and proceeded further to explain: "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 existing 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 phenomenon--to socialism. It is only because Marx looked at capitalism from the socialist's viewpoint, that is, from the historic viewpoint, that he was enabled to decipher the hieroglyphics of capitalist economy. And it is precisely because he took the socialist viewpoint as a point of departure for his analysis of bourgeois society, that he was in the position to give a scientific base to the socialist movement." (Ibid, p. 34, my emphasis, ff)

It is impossible that a leader of our movement should be unaware of this classic statement of the concept of the inevitability of socialism as the only possible basis for scientific socialism. Why, then, did Com. Gates ignore it? Is he ready to class this among the "silly things" that have been said on the subject of inevitability? Was Luxemburg one of the "early socialist writers and theoreticians (who) dealt with this question in a false way, more precisely, in an idealistic manner, treating socialism as though its realization was automatic."? Surely, the question of "automaticity" appears nowhere in my outline. Against whom is Com. Gates arguing? More important still, what is he arguing against? Com. Gates's key to knowledge is a key that fits many locks, but opens few doors, and least of all the door to the Marxian dialectical method.

Com. Gates appears much agitated and I do not doubt his anxiety to save "the inexperienced" from the "pure idealism", if not sheep mysticism, of Forest's views. But, in his desire to accomplish his aim, he has freed the "not-yet-educated" from so many unspecified "silly things" about the inevitability of socialism, that he has left the door wide open to one philosophic method, the method of unadulterated American pragmatism. Alas, he himself has walked into that open door both in the matter of the inevitability of socialism as in the analysis of the law of motion of capitalist society, his other criticism of my outline.

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II. The Single Capitalist Society vs. The Single World Trust

1. The Outline of Capital and the Russian Question

Com. Gates violently opposes the following paragraph in my outline:

"The centralization of the means of production ends, first, in trustification, and, ultimately, in statification... This dialectical development is accompanied by centralization reaching a point where the entire social capital is united, either in the hands of one single capitalist, or in those of a single corporation."

Com. Gates accuses me of combining "a visible fact about capitalist development (centralization of means of production and trustification)... with a possible development, a prognosis made by Marx in recognition of a tendency." I have thus made it "appear that Marx unconditionally predicted the realization of the tendency... Forest has amputated Marx's thought to serve her own ends." May I ask: what ends?

To answer that, Com. Gates descends from his lofty realm of unconscious spirit. But he descends not upon the ground upon which the dispute is being held --my Outline of Capital--but charges boldly into territories unchartered there.

For the benefit of the readers who may be unaware that Com. Gates has by now entirely departed from the Outline, and who may be further mystified about the abstract persons in whose hands a passage from Engels' Anti-Duhring "has been mutilated, misrepresented and misinterpreted", let me hurry to inform them that the passage quoted by Gates has indeed been used by me--not, it is true, in the Outline, but in my articles on Russia (See N.I., Jan. 1947). Now, place the F. Forest of Nature of the Russian Economy next to the F. Forest of the Outline, and you will see that, to serve my "own ends", I have not only "mutilated" Marx's statement that the extreme development of the law of centralization is reached when the entire social capital is concentrated in the hands of "one single capitalist", but have likewise mutilated Engels who had written that statification of the means of production "does not deprive the productive forces of their character of capital." And all this, dear readers, I (pardon me, the unnamed persons) did "for the sole purpose of proving that capitalism exists in Russia today."

Finally the cat is out of the bag. What is bothering Com. Gates is not my Outline, but my Russian position. If he wishes to discuss the Russian question, why not say so? For six years I have been writing that Russia is a state capitalist society, without too much response from Com. Gates. If he now wishes to engage in such a discussion, I am ready as I always have been. But I shall strongly resist bringing this dispute into an educational Outline of Marx's Capital.

"I am opposed," argues Com. Gates, to presenting theory in such a way that the reader is forced to accept implications which are contrary to the spirit of Marxist inquiry and to party policy as well." (My emphasis, ff)

What is the party policy on the question? I was unaware of any Party Resolution on the question of Marx's theory of capitalist production. I am aware of a Party Resolution on the question that Russia is a new social order, "bureaucratic collectivism." But I shall leave the question of party policy till later, and now limit myself to a defense of my Outline. Far from violating "the spirit of Marxist inquiry," my outline is an attempt at popularizing Marx's monumental work. It is the first venture of its kind in the Trotskyist movement. Com. Gates evidently does not think highly of this venture. Good.\* But let us come to grips with the problem involved, and not hide behind the shield, who correctly represents the party policy, and who does not.

## 2. The Problem at Stake

Before his death in 1883 Marx was working on a new German edition of Capital, in which he was incorporating the changes he had introduced into the French edition. Engels completed the work, and Capital as we now know it includes these changes. Marx considered these additions to be of such a serious nature that he advised the reader who was acquainted only with the original German edition of his work to consult the French edition since "it possess a scientific value independent of the original." (Dona Torr edition, p 842). From the "scientific value" of these changes Marxists of this generation have a great lesson to learn. Let us see how Gates grasped this lesson.

The most important of these changes includes the passage presently under dispute, which reads: "This limit would not be reached in any particular society until the entire social capital would be united, either in the hands of one single capitalist, or in those of one single corporation." (Capital, I p. 688)

Gates has much to say about my "mutilation" of Marx, but what has he to say about the passage as Marx wrote it? Supposing that I stated that I was wrong, in 1947, in a brief summation of the first volume, a few short pages after the quote was made in full,\*\* to use the word "is" where Marx, in 1875, used the word, "would", how would that change anything in the crucial matter as to whether Marx did, or did not, postulate such an abstraction as a given single capitalist society?\*\*\*

So befuddled has Gates become by his forced attempt to introduce the Russian question into the dispute on the Outline that it is impossible to make head or tail out of his arguments. He began to

\* The majority of the comrades, unfortunately, are in no position to judge for themselves since, due to shortage of paper, only a few copies of the Outline have been released.

\*\* Com. Gates writes as if I had never given the full text of the quotation. No doubt that utterly false idea arises from the fact that he rushed to criticize one section before he had had "the opportunity to examine the whole outline carefully." The comrades can find the quotation when the Outline is released, on p.43.

\*\*\* The expression Marx used in his Theories of Surplus Value was:  
"an isolated nation."

criticize my Outline, because I had there combined "a visible fact... with a prognosis". It now develops that this prognosis was not even implied by Marx!

"Forest presents the tendency as a finished, completed process in a sentence whose grammatical structure suggests something which Marx did not say, explicitly or implicitly." (The last three words are underlined by me, FF)

Hold there! Did, or did not, Marx postulate such an abstraction? Are you now implying, Com. Gates, that since Marx said that this extreme limit to the law of centralization "would not be reached until..." that, in actuality, Marx did not "explicitly or implicitly" formulate such a theoretic possibility? If that is so, I can only state that there ought to be a limit to what case one is permitted to elaborate on the basis of a "grammatical construction"!

Without explaining his contradictory statement, Com. Gates continues:

"The task of Marxists today is to determine how tendencies develop, whether or not they have been realized in modern society, or whether society has taken other turns, in opposition to the tendency."

And what turn has modern society taken "in opposition to the tendency"? Gates has nothing to offer.\*\*\* He writes that "The big bourgeoisie, the dominant monopolists are compelled to oppose statification." Since they are compelled to oppose, the opposition cannot be merely because of their free will, they would prefer not to have their means of production statified. Marxists, in any case, know that bourgeois society is government by economic laws. What economic law compels them to oppose statification?

Com. Gates continues: "As a matter of fact, two parallel developments occur in modern bourgeois society springing from a common cause."

These include centralization in a given society, with which we are acquainted, and "the tendency toward world monopoly, toward the single world capitalist trust." What is their "common cause"? The law of centralization? If so, the "two parallel developments" are not opposing tendencies but different manifestations of the same law. If the parallel tendencies are opposing tendencies, then what common source do they spring from? Surely, it would be a discovery worthy of note if Com. Gates had discerned an economic law that had not been discerned by Marx in his time. Why keep it a secret?

In any case Marx did not postulate the variant of a single world trust; Kautsky did. Lenin contended that, given the inter-imperialist rivalry and the sharpness of the class struggle, such a possibility was "not conceivable". This writer thinks that if such a possibility did occur, that is, if a single world trust existed and the world

\*\*\*We are charitable enough to disregard the instance of reprivatization of some decrepit industries in Nazi Germany just Com. Gates cites in the hope that it is only an instance and not a tendency.

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market were abolished, we would no longer be living in a capitalist society. But what has this to do with the Outline? What relation to the Outline has Gates's further flights on the question of state capitalism "under conditions of proletarian state power"? If any such state capitalism were implied in my Outline, then, indeed, the "spirit" which led me to "mutilate" Marx and miseducate the youth, turned around and mutilated (without quotation marks) my own point of view of Russia as a state capitalist society.

### 3. Russia Again

Against whom is Com. Gates arguing when he writes that "we have also learned today that mere nationalization, even where it is complete, it is not necessarily progressive..."? Is he trying to square things with his own, and the party's past position; that: "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." (See Party's Thesis on The Russian Question in the Bulletin under that name.)

Surely he isn't arguing against Forest, who, back in 1941, supported a resolution which stated that state capitalism, under totalitarian politics, made Russia a "fascist state"! What is bothering Com. Gates?

In one place, Com. Gates writes: "A concrete examination of bourgeois society reveals that 'the centralization of the means of production' has not anywhere ended 'ultimately in statification.'"

In another place, he writes "Statification of economy is to be found only in one country in the world: Stalinist Russia."

After suddenly admitting the existence of the statification of production, Com. Gates makes two qualifications: (1) It came about in Russia as a result of a proletarian revolution, and (2) "statification reveals itself now as an anti-capitalist tendency."

Only one point needs to be made regarding the first qualification, and in essence, Marx has made that point back in 1875. Right below the disputed passage, Marx wrote "whether centralization is accomplished by the violent method of annexation... or whether the fusion of a number of capitals... takes place by the smoother method of joint-stock company formation--the economic effect remains the same."

In any case, I was not writing a history of society and was not interested in how statification had occurred. I was interested only in tracing Marx's analysis of the logical development of an economic law of capitalism--centralization of the means of production--in order to show that none of the economic laws we analyzed obviated the "absolute general law": "This ultimate development, in no way", I wrote on p. 55, "saves capitalist production from its 'absolute general law'--the reserve army of labor", which signals the doom of capitalism... The law of motion of capitalist society is therefore the law of its collapse." (p. 55)

And, finally, we must deal with the second qualification of Gates, that "statification reveals itself now as an anti-capitalist tendency," This brings us back to the question of party policy. I know of no

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Resolution which states that stabilization of production as such is "anti-capitalist". I am well aware of a Party resolution which states that Russia is a new social order. Now, I wish to ask Com. Gates: Is he implying that I include the party policy on Russia in a study outline of CAPITAL?

Why not leave to the Stalinists revisions of Capital to suit every changing party policy?

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