

What Is Marxism?

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PUBLISHERS' FOREWORD

The publishers of this little volume have no hesitation in stating that this is the best, short exposition of Marxism yet published in the English language. This, however, does not mean that it is a complete work on Marxism. Obviously, the full treatment of any branch of science would require the space of many large volumes. As Marxism embraces the sciences of political-economy, sociology and philosophy, and touches upon every aspect of man's activity from pre-historic times to the present day, a complete understanding of Marxism can be gained only by a study of the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and others, listed in the bibliography on the back of this booklet.

However, Emile Burns' *What Is Marxism?*, as an introduction for new students, or as a handy refresher for past students and lecturers, will be found an adequate guide. It is not just another booklet to be read and forgotten. It is a concise outline of Marxism that will repay repeated readings and serious study. New investigators of Marxism will find themselves stimulated to seek more knowledge of the theories of Scientific Socialism, as expounded by Marxists; and every Marxist, no matter what his degree of knowledge, will find within these pages a method of exposition most helpful to the imparting of Marxist theory, whether in the lecture hall, or study group.

Finally, we direct the attention of those coming into contact with Marxism for the first time, through the pages of this booklet, that the only banner-bearers of Marxist theory are the Communist Parties of the various countries; that this Party, alone, gives practical application to these principles "...everywhere and at all times, on the historical conditions for the time being existing..." That "...the Communists everywhere support revolutionary movements against the existing order of things." And "...they labour everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries."

The application of Marxian principles by the architect and builder of the mighty U.S.S.R., the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik), is a lesson in combining theory with practice that must ever be heeded by those who would devote their lives to the emancipation of mankind.

Melbourne, 1945

CHAPTER I

A SCIENTIFIC VIEW OF THE WORLD

Marxism is a general theory of the world in which we live, and of human society as a part of that world. It takes its name from Karl Marx (1818-1883), who, together with Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), worked out the theory during the middle and latter part of last century.

They set out to discover why human society is what it is, why it changes, and what further changes are in store for mankind. Their studies led them to the conclusion that these changes – like the changes in external nature – are not accidental, but follow certain laws. This fact makes it possible to work out a **scientific** theory of society, based on the actual experience of men, as opposed to the vague notions about society which used to be (and still are) put forward – notions associated with religious beliefs, race and hero-worship, personal inclinations or utopian dreams.

Marx applied this general idea to the society in which he lived – mainly capitalist Britain – and worked out the economic theory of capitalism by which he is most widely known. But he always insisted that his economic theories could not be separated from his historical and social theories. Profits and wages can be studied up to a certain point as purely economic problems; but the student who sets out to study real life and not abstractions soon realises that profits and wages can only be fully understood when **employers and workers** are brought into the picture; and these in turn lead on to a study of the historical stage in which they live.

The scientific approach to the development of society is based, like all science, on experience, on the facts of history and of the world around us. Therefore Marxism is not a completed, finished theory. As history unfolds, as man gathers more experience, Marxism is constantly being developed and applied to the new facts that have come to light. The most outstanding of these developments, since the death of Marx and Engels, have been made by V. I. Lenin (1870-1924), and by Joseph Stalin, who has continued Lenin's work in building up the new socialist society in Russia.

The result of the scientific approach to the study of society is knowledge that can be used to change society, just as all scientific knowledge can be used to change the external world. But it also makes clear that the general laws which govern the movement of

society are of the same pattern as the laws of the external world. These laws which hold good universally, both for men and things, make up what may be called the Marxist philosophy or view of the world.

The following chapters deal with Marxist theory in the fields which are of most immediate interest. It is essential, however, for the student to realise from the outset that Marxism does not claim recognition because it is based on abstract moral principles, but because it is true. And because it is true, it can be and should be used to rid humanity forever of the evils and misery which afflict so many in the world today, and to help men and women forward to full development in a higher form of society.

CHAPTER II

THE LAWS OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The history of mankind is usually presented in the form of a record of wars between nations and the exploits of individual monarchs, generals or statesmen. Sometimes the motives of these individuals are described in a purely personal way – their ambitions led them to conquer territory, or their moral or immoral outlook caused them to adopt certain policies. Sometimes they are described as acting for the sake of the country's honour or prestige, or from some motive of religion.

Marxism is not satisfied with such an approach to history.

In the first place, it considers that the real science of history must deal with the peoples, and only with individuals in so far as they represent something much wider than themselves – some movement of the people.

For example, Cromwell is important not because of his own outlook and individual actions, but because he played an important part in the movement of a section of the English people against the old order. He and his movement broke down the barriers of feudalism, and opened the way for the widespread development of capitalism in Britain. What matters is not the record of his battles and his religious outlook and intrigues. But the study of Cromwell's place in the development of British production and distribution, the understanding of why, at that period and in Britain, the struggle developed against the feudal monarchy; the study of the changes actually brought about in that period – these are important; they are the basis of a **science** of history. By using the knowledge derived from such a study (along with the study of other periods and of other peoples), it is possible to draw up general theories – **laws** of the development of society, which are just as real as the laws of chemistry or any other science. And once we know these laws we can make use of them, just as we can make use of any scientific law – we can not only foretell what is likely to happen, but can **act** in such a way as to make sure that it does happen; or, as in the case of fascism, to stop it happening.

So Marxism approaches the study of history in order to trace the natural laws which run through all human history, and for this purpose it looks not at individuals but at peoples. And when it looks at peoples (after the stage of primitive society) it finds that there are

different sections of the people, some pulling one way and some another, not as individuals, but as classes.

What are these classes? In the simplest terms, they are sections of the people who get their living in the same way. In feudal society the monarch and the feudal lords got their living from some form of tribute (whether personal service or payments in kind) provided by their “serfs,” who actually produced things, mainly on the land. The feudal lords were a class, with interests as a class – they all wanted to get as much as possible out of the labour of their serfs; they all wanted to extend their land and the number of serfs working for them. On the other hand, the serfs were a class, with their own class interests. They wanted to keep more of what they produced for themselves and their families, instead of handing it over to their lords; they wanted freedom to work for themselves; they wanted to do away with the harsh treatment they received at the hands of their lords, who were also their law-makers and their judges. An Anglo-Saxon writer expressed the feelings of a serf who had to plough his lord’s land: “Oh, sir, I work very hard. I go out in the dawning, driving the oxen to the field and yoke them to the plough. Be the winter never so stark, I dare not stay at home for fear of my lord; but every day I must plough a full acre or more” (Quoted by Eileen Power in *Medieval People*, p. 22).

Hence in every feudal country there was a constant struggle going on between the lords and the serfs, sometimes only on an individual basis, or a group of serfs against their particular lord; sometimes on a much wider basis, when large numbers of serfs acted together, in order to try to get their general conditions of life made easier. The revolt of 1381 in England, led by John Ball and Wat Tyler, is an instance of this. The full story is told in H. Fagan’s *Nine Days that Shook England*. Similar risings of serfs or peasants occurred in Germany, Russia and many other countries, while the struggle was continually going on on a smaller scale.

In addition to the obligations to work their lord’s land, there were many forms of tribute to be paid in kind – not only a share of the produce of their own holding, but products of the handicraft of the serfs and their families. There were some specialised producers – for example, makers of weapons and equipment. And there were merchants who bought surplus products, trading them for the products of other regions or countries. With the increase of trade, these merchants began to need more than the surplus produced by serfs

and not required by their lords; they therefore began to develop organised production for the market, using the whole-time labour of serfs who had been freed or had succeeded in escaping from their lords. Some of the freed serfs also managed to set themselves up in the towns as free craftsmen, producing cloth, metalware and other articles. So in a slow development, lasting hundreds of years, there grew up within feudal production for local consumption, also production for the market, carried on by independent artisans and employers of wage-labour. The independent artisans also gradually developed into **employers of labour**, with “journeymen” working for them for wages. So from the sixteenth century onwards there was coming into existence a new class, the industrial capitalist class, with its “shadow,” the industrial working class. In the countryside, too, the old feudal obligations had broken down – personal service was changed into money rent, the serfs were transformed in many cases into free peasants, each on his holding, and the landowner began to pay wages for the labour-power he needed on his own farms; in this way, too, the capitalist farmer came into existence, along with the farm labourer earning wages.

But the growth of the capitalist class in town and country did not automatically put an end to the former ruling class of feudal lords. On the contrary, the monarchy, the old landed aristocracy and the Church did their utmost to use the new capitalism for their own benefit. The serfs who had been freed or escaped to the towns had also escaped from having to pay tribute (in personal service, in kind or in money) to the lords. But when the descendants of these serfs grew relatively rich, they began to find that they were not really free – the king and the feudal nobility made them pay taxes of all kinds, imposed restrictions on their trade, and prevented the free development of their manufacturing business.

The king and the old landed nobility were able to do this because they controlled the machinery of the State – armed forces, judges and prisons; while they also made the laws. Therefore the growth of the capitalist class also meant the growth of new forms of class struggle. The capitalists had to engage in a struggle against the monarchy and the feudal lords, a struggle which continued over many centuries. In some relatively backward countries it is still going on – but in Britain and France, for example, it has been completed.

How did this come about?

By the capitalist class taking power from the former feudal rulers, by means of an armed revolution. In Britain, where this stage was reached far earlier than in other countries, the continuous struggle of the growing capitalist class against taxation and restrictions reached a high point in the middle of the seventeenth century. These restrictions were holding back the expansion of the capitalist form of production. The capitalists tried to get them removed by peaceful means – petitions to the king, by refusing to pay taxes, and so on; but nothing far-reaching could be won against the machinery of the State. Therefore the capitalists had to meet force with force; they had to rouse the people against the king, against arbitrary taxation and trade restrictions, against the arrests and penalties imposed by the king's judges for all attempts to break through the feudal barriers. In other words, the capitalists had to organise an armed revolution, to lead the people to rise in arms against the king and the old forms of oppression – to defeat the former rulers by military means. Only after this had been done was it possible for the capitalist class to become the ruling class, to break down all barriers to the development of capitalism, and to make the laws needed for this.

It is perfectly true that this capitalist revolution in England is presented in most histories as a fight against Charles I as a despotic, scheming monarch of Roman Catholic leanings, while Cromwell is represented as a highly respectable anti-Catholic, with great ideals of British freedom. The struggle, in short, is presented as a moral, religious fight. Marxism goes deeper than the individuals, and deeper than the watchwords under which the fight was carried on. It sees the essence of the struggle of that period as the fight of the rising capitalist class to take power from the old feudal ruling class. And in fact it was a clear turning-point: after that revolution, and the second stage of it in 1689, the capitalist class won a considerable share in the control of the State.

In England, owing to the early stage at which the capitalist revolution came, the victory of the capitalists was not decisive and not complete. As a result of this, though the old feudal relations were largely destroyed, the landowning class (including rich recruits from the towns) to a great extent survived and itself developed as capitalist landlords, merging with the moneyed interests over the next two centuries, and keeping a considerable share in the control of the State.

But in France, where the whole process came later, and the capitalist revolution did not take place until 1789, the immediate changes were more far-reaching. To the Marxist, however, this was not due to the fact that Rousseau and other writers had written works proclaiming the rights of man, nor to the fact that the popular watchwords of the revolution were “Liberty-Equality-Fraternity.” Just as the essence of the Cromwell revolution is to be found in the class struggle and not in the religious watchwords, so the essence of the French revolution is to be found in the class relations and not in the abstract principles of justice inscribed on its banners.

Marx says of such periods: “Just as we cannot judge an individual on the basis of his own opinion of himself, so such a revolutionary period cannot be judged from its own consciousness.” What is important for the understanding of revolutionary periods is to see the classes struggling for power, the new class taking power from the old; even if, consciously or unconsciously, the leaders of the new class proclaim their fight to be for what are apparently abstract ideas or issues not directly connected with the question of class interests and class power.

The Marxist approach to history sees the struggle between contending classes as the principal driving force in the development of human society. But along with the struggle of classes goes also the growth of science of man’s power over nature, man’s power to produce the things he needs for life. The discovery of power-driven machinery was an immense step forward in production; but it was not only this. It also brought with it the destruction of the producer owning his own spinning wheel and weaving-frame, who could no longer compete against rival producers using power-driven machinery which enabled a worker to spin and weave in one day more than the artisan could produce in a week. Therefore the individual producer, who owned and used his own instruments of production, gave place to two groups of people – the capitalist class, who owned the new power-driven machinery but did not work it; and the industrial working class, which did not own any means of production, but worked (for wages) for the owner.

This change came about unconsciously, without being planned by anyone; it was the direct result of the new knowledge gained by a few people who applied it to production for their own advantage, but without in any way foreseeing or desiring the social consequences that followed from it. Marx held that this was true of all

changes in human society: man was steadily increasing his knowledge, applying his new-found knowledge to production, and by this causing profound social changes. These social changes led to class conflicts, which took the form of conflicts over ideas or institutions – religion, parliament, justice and so on – because the ideas and institutions then current had grown up on the basis of the old mode of production and the old class relations.

Take for example the institution of the “estates.” These, in England, used to be the Lords Spiritual, the Lords Temporal and the Commons; each “estate” had separate representation in early parliaments. Although these still survive in the formal division between the House of Lords and the House of Commons, the “estates” have lost all significance with the sweeping away of feudalism and the new division of society into capitalists and workers. In France there is not a trace of the old division into “estates;” and in White America such “estates” were never heard of, because at the time of the growth of the United States feudalism was already nearing its end.

What brought such ideas and institutions into existence and what brought them to an end? Marx pointed out that always and everywhere the ideas and institutions only grew up out of the actual practice of men. The first thing was: the production of the means of life – of food and clothing and shelter. In every historical social group – the primitive tribe, slave society, feudal society, modern capitalist society – the relations between the members of the group depended on the form of production. Institutions were not thought out in advance, but grew up out of what was customary in each group; institutions, laws, moral precepts and other ideas merely crystallised, as it were, out of customs, and the customs were directly associated with the form of production.

It follows, therefore, that when the form of production changed – for example from feudalism to capitalism – the institutions and ideas also changed. What was moral at one stage became immoral at another, and vice versa. And naturally at the time when the material change was taking place – the change in the form of production – there was always a conflict of ideas, a challenge to existing institutions.

With the actual growth of capitalist production came the conflict with the feudal relations – in the new form of production capital was to be in practice supreme. So there came up conflicting ideas: not divine right, but “no taxation without representation,” the

right to trade freely, and new religious conceptions expressing more individual right, less centralised control. But what seemed to be free men fighting to the death for abstract rights and religious forms was in fact the struggle between rising capitalism and dying feudalism; the conflict of **ideas** was secondary.

It is for this reason that Marxists do not set up abstract “principles” for the organisation of society, like the writers of Utopias. Marxism considers that all such “principles” as have appeared in human thought merely reflect the actual organisation of society at a particular time and place, and do not and cannot hold good always and everywhere. Moreover, ideas that seem to be universal – such as the idea of human equality – in fact do not mean the same thing in different stages of society. In the Greek City States, the idea of the equal rights of men did not apply to slaves; the “liberty, equality and fraternity” of the great French Revolution meant the liberty of the rising capitalist class to trade freely, the equality of this class with the feudal lords, and the fraternity of this class with itself – the mutual aid against feudal oppressions and restrictions. None of these ideas applied to the slaves in the French colonies, or even to the poorer sections of the population in France itself.

Hence we can say that most ideas, especially those connected with the organisation of society, are class ideas, the ideas of the dominant class in society, which imposes them on the rest of society through its ownership of the machinery of propaganda, its control of education and its power to punish contrary ideas through the law courts, through dismissals and similar measures. This does not mean that the dominant class says to itself: Here is an idea which of course isn't true, but we will force other people to believe it, or at least not to deny it in public. On the contrary, the dominant class does not as a rule invent such ideas. The ideas come up out of actual life – the actual power of the feudal lord or of the rich industrialist who has been created a peer is the material basis for the idea that “noblemen” are superior to other people. But once the idea has come up and been established, it becomes important for the dominant class to make sure that everyone accepts it – for if people do not accept it, this means that they will not act in accordance with it – for example, that they will challenge the king's divine right (and perhaps even go to the length of cutting off his head). So the dominant class of any period and any country – not only Japan – does what it can to prevent “dangerous thoughts” from spreading.

But, it may be asked, if ideas are secondary, if the primary fact is always the material change in the form of production, how can any “dangerous thoughts” arise? How, in short, can people think of a new form of production before it actually arises?

The answer is that they cannot think of it before the conditions for its existence have appeared. But they **are made to** think of it when these conditions have appeared, by the very conflict between the old conditions and the new forces of production.

For example, with the actual growth of production by wage labour, and the necessity to sell the products in order to realise the profit, the early capitalist was brought up sharply against the feudal restrictions on trade. Hence the idea of freedom from restrictions, of having a say in fixing taxes, and so on. It was not yet capitalist society, but the conditions for a capitalist society had arisen, and out of these came the capitalist ideas.

It is the same with socialist ideas. Scientific as opposed to utopian socialist ideas could only arise when the conditions for socialist society had developed – when large-scale production was widespread, and when it had become clear, through repeated crises of over-production, that capitalism was holding back social progress.

But although ideas can only arise from material conditions, when they do arise they certainly exert an influence on men’s actions and therefore on the course of things. Ideas based on the old system of production are conservative – they hold back men’s actions, and that is why the dominant class in each period does everything it can to teach these ideas. But ideas based on the new conditions of production are progressive – they encourage action to carry through the change to the new system, and that is why the dominant class regards them as dangerous. Thus the idea that a social system is bad which destroys food to keep up prices, at a time when large numbers of citizens are in a state of semi-starvation, is clearly a “dangerous thought.” It leads on to the idea of a system in which production is for use and not for profit; and this leads to the organisation of socialist and communist parties, which begin to work to bring about the change to the new system.

The Marxist conception of social development (known as “historical materialism”) is therefore not a materialist “determinism” – the theory that man’s actions are absolutely determined by the material world round him. On the contrary, man’s actions, and the material changes which these actions bring about, are the product partly

of the material world outside him, and partly of his own knowledge of how to control the material world. But he only gets his knowledge through experience of the material world, which, so to speak, comes first. He gets the experience of the material world not in an abstract, arm-chair way, but in the course of producing the things he needs for life. And as his knowledge increases, as he invents new methods of production and operates them, the old forms of social organisation become a barrier, preventing the full use of the new methods. Man becomes aware of this from the actual practice of life; he fights first against particular evils, particular barriers created by the old form of social organisation. But inevitably he is drawn into a **general** fight against the whole former system.

Up to a certain point, the whole process by which new productive forces develop out of the old system is unconscious and unplanned, and so also is the struggle against the old forms of social organisation which preserve the old system. But always a stage is reached when the old class relations are seen to be the barrier preventing the new productive forces from being fully used; it is at this stage that the conscious action of “the class with the future in its hands” comes into play.

But the process of developing the productive forces need no longer be unconscious and unplanned. Man has accumulated sufficient experience, sufficient knowledge of the laws of social change, to pass on to the next stage in a conscious and planned way, and to set up a society in which production is conscious and planned. Engels says (**Handbook of Marxism**, p 299):

“The objective, external forces which have hitherto dominated history will then pass under the control of men themselves. It is only from this point that men, with full consciousness, will fashion their own history.”

CHAPTER III

CAPITALIST SOCIETY

A great part of Marx's life was devoted to the study of capitalism – the method of production which had succeeded feudalism in Britain and was establishing itself all over the world in the course of last century. The aim of his study was to discover the “law of motion” of capitalist society. Capitalism had not always existed, but had grown up gradually; it was not the same in Marx's day as it had been at the time of the “industrial revolution” in Britain in the latter part of the eighteenth century. The problem was not merely to describe the capitalist method of production of his own time, but to make an analysis which would show why and in what direction it was changing. This approach to the question was new. Other writers on economic matters took capitalism as it was, and described it as if it was a fixed, eternal system; for Marx, this method of production, like all others in history, was changing. The result of his study was therefore not only a description, but a scientific forecast, because he was able to see the way in which capitalism was in fact developing.

Capitalist production grew out of individual production of feudal times. The typical feudal form of production was production for local consumption: food, clothing and other articles were produced by the serfs for themselves and for their feudal lords. With the development of a surplus – that is, more articles than the particular group needed – the surplus was sold in exchange for articles brought in from other countries or from other parts of the country. But the main part of production was still for consumption by the producing group and the lord who had feudal rights over it.

It was only when the feudal units began to break up that this form of production gradually gave way to production for profit, which is the essential mark of capitalism. Production for profit required two things: someone with enough resources to buy means of production (looms, spinning-machines and so on); and, secondly, people who had no means of production themselves, no resources by using which they could live. In other words, there had to be “capitalists,” who owned means of production, and workers whose only chance of getting a livelihood was to work the machines owned by the capitalists.

The workers produced things, not directly for themselves or for the personal use of their new “lord,” the capitalist, but for the capi-

talist to sell for money. Things made in this way are called “commodities” – that is, articles produced for sale on the market. The worker received wages, the employer received profit – something that was left after the consumer had paid for the articles, and after the capitalist had paid wages, the cost of raw materials and other costs of production.

What was the source of this profit? Marx pointed out that it could not possibly come from the capitalists selling the products above their value – this would mean that all capitalists were all the time cheating each other, and where one made a “profit” of this kind the other necessarily made a loss, and the profits and losses would cancel each other out, leaving no general profit. It therefore followed that the value of an article on the market must already contain the profit: the profit must arise in the course of production, and not in the sale of the product.

The enquiry must therefore lead to an examination of the process of production, to see whether there is some factor in production which adds value greater than its cost (its own value).

But first it is necessary to ask what is meant by “value.” In ordinary language, value can have two quite distinct meanings. It may mean value for use by someone – a thirsty man “values” a drink; a particular thing may have a “sentimental value” for someone. But there is also another meaning in ordinary use – the value of a thing when sold on the market, by any seller to any buyer, which is what is known as its “exchange value.”

Now it is true that, even in a capitalist system, particular things may be produced for particular buyers and a special price arranged; but what Marx was concerned with was normal capitalist production – the system under which millions of tons of products of all kinds are being produced for the market in general, for any buyer that can be found. What gives products their normal “exchange value” on the market? Why, for example, has a yard of cloth more exchange value than a pin?

Exchange value is measured in terms of money; an article is “worth” a certain amount of money. But what makes it possible for things to be compared with each other in value, whether through money or for direct exchange? Marx pointed out that things can only be compared in this way if there is something common to all of them, of which some have more and some less, so that a comparison is possible. This common factor is obviously not weight or colour or

any other physical property; nor is it “use value” for human life (necessary foods have far less exchange value than motor cars) or any other abstraction. There is only one factor common to all products – they are produced by human labour. A thing has greater exchange value if more human labour has been put into its production; exchange value is determined by the “labour-time” spent on each article.

But, of course, not the individual labour-time. When things are bought and sold on a general market, their exchange value as individual products is averaged out, and the exchange value of any particular yard of cloth of a certain weight and quality is determined by the “average socially necessary labour-time” required for its production.

If this is the general basis for the exchange value of things produced under capitalism, what determines the amount of wages paid to the actual producer, the worker? Marx put the question in precisely the same way: what is the common factor between things produced under capitalism and labour-power under capitalism, which we know also has an exchange value on the market? There is no such factor other than the factor which we have already seen determines the exchange value of ordinary products – the labour-time spent in producing them. What is meant by the labour-time spent in producing labour-power? It is the time (the average “socially necessary” time) spent in producing the food, shelter, warmth and other things which keep the worker from week to week. In normal capitalist society, the things necessary to maintain the family of the worker have also to be taken into account. The labour-time necessary for producing all these things determines the exchange value of the worker’s labour-power, which he sells to the capitalist for wages.

But while, in modern capitalist society, the time spent in maintaining the worker’s labour-power may be only four hours a day, his power to labour lasts eight, ten or more hours a day. For the first four hours each day, therefore, his actual labour is producing the equivalent of what is paid to him in wages; for the remaining hours of his working day he is producing “surplus value” which his employer appropriates. This is the source of capitalist profit – the value produced by the worker over and above the value of his own keep – that is, the wages he receives.

The brief statement of Marx's analysis of value and surplus value needs to be made more exact in many ways, and there is not space to cover every variation. But a few of the general points can be indicated.

The term "exchange value" has been used, because this is the basis of the whole analysis. But in actual life things hardly ever sell at precisely their exchange value. Whether material products or human labour power, they are bought and sold on the market at a **price**, which may be either above or below the correct exchange value. There may be a surplus of the particular product on the market, and the price that day may be far below the correct exchange value; or, if there is a shortage, the price may rise above the value. These fluctuations in price are, in fact, influenced by "supply and demand," and this led many capitalist economists to think that supply and demand was the sole factor in price. But it is clear that supply and demand only cause fluctuations about a definite level. What that level is, whether it is one penny or a hundred pounds, is clearly not determined by supply and demand, but by the labour-time used in producing the article.

The actual price of labour-power – the actual wages paid – is also influenced by supply and demand; but it is influenced by other factors as well – the strength of trade union organisation in particular. Nevertheless, the price of labour-power in ordinary capitalist society always fluctuates around a definite level – the equivalent of the worker's keep, taking into account that the various grades and groups of workers have varying needs, which are themselves largely the result of previous trade union struggles establishing a standard above the lowest minimum standard for existence.

The labour-power of different grades of workers is not, of course, identical in value; an hour's work of a skilled engineer produces more value than an hour's work of an unskilled labourer. Marx showed that such differences were in fact accounted for when articles were sold on the market, which, as he put it, recorded a definite relation between what the more skilled worker made in an hour and what the labourer made in an hour.

How does this difference in value come about? Marx answers: not on any "principle" that skill is ethically better than lack of skill or any other abstract notion. The fact that a skilled worker's labour-power has more exchange value than the labourer's is due to exactly the same factor that makes a steamship more valuable than a row-

ing-boat – more human labour has gone to the making of it. The whole process of training the skilled worker, besides the higher standard of living which is essential for the maintenance of his skill, involves more labour-time.

Another point to note is that if the intensity of labour is increased beyond what was the previous average, this is equivalent to a longer labour-time; eight hours of intensified labour may produce values equivalent to ten or twelve hours of what was previously normal labour.

What is the importance of the analysis made by Marx to show the source of profit? It is that it explains the class struggle of the capitalist period. In each factory or other enterprise the wages paid to the workers are not the equivalent of the full value they produce, but only equal to about half this value, or even less. The rest of the value produced by the worker during his working day (i.e. after he has produced the equivalent of his wages) is taken outright by his employer. The employer is therefore constantly trying to increase the amount taken from the worker. He can do this in several ways: for example, by reducing the worker's wages; this means that the worker works a smaller proportion of the day for himself, and a greater proportion for the employer. The same result is achieved by "speeding up" or intensifying the labour – the worker produces his keep in a smaller proportion of the working day, and works a larger proportion for his employer. The same result, again, is achieved by lengthening the working day, which increases the proportion of the working day spent in working for the employer. On the other hand, the worker fights to improve his own position by demanding higher wages and shorter hours and by resisting "speeding up."

Hence the continuous struggle between the capitalists and the workers, which can never end so long as the capitalist system of production lasts. This struggle, starting on the basis of the individual worker or group of workers fighting an individual employer, gradually widens out. Trade union organisation, on the one hand, and employers' organisation on the other, bring great sections of each class into action against each other. Finally, political organisations of the workers are built up, which as they extend can bring all industrial groups and other sections of the people into action against the capitalist class. In its highest form, this struggle becomes revolution – the overthrow of the capitalist class and the establishment of a new system of production in which the workers do not work

part of the day for the benefit of another class. This point is worked out more fully in later chapters; the essential thing to note is that the class struggle under capitalism is due to the character of capitalist production itself – the antagonistic interests of the two classes, which continually clash in the process of production.

Having analysed wages and profits, we now pass to the study of capital. First it must be noted that the “surplus value” created by the worker in the course of production is not all kept by his employer. It is, so to speak, a fund from which different capitalist groups take their pickings – the landowner takes rent, the banker takes interest, the middleman takes his “merchant’s profit,” and the actual industrial employer only gets what is left as his own profit. This in no way affects the preceding analysis; it only means that all these capitalist sections are, as it were, carrying on a certain subsidiary struggle among themselves for the division of the spoils. But they are all united in wanting to get the utmost possible out of the working class.

What is capital?

It has many physical forms: machinery, buildings, raw materials, fuel and other things required for production; it is also money used to pay wages for production.

Yet not all machinery, buildings and so on, and not even all sums of money are capital. For example, a peasant on the west coast of Ireland may have some sort of building to live in, with a few yards of ground round it; he may have some livestock, and a boat of some sort; he may even have some little sum of money. But if he is his own master and nobody else’s, none of his property is capital. That is the position also of the peasant in the Soviet Union today.

Property (whatever the physical form) only becomes capital in the economic sense when it is used to produce surplus value; that it, when it is used to employ workers, who in the course of producing things also produce surplus value.

What is the origin of such capital?

Looking back through history, the early accumulation of capital was very largely open robbery. Vast quantities of capital in the form of gold and other costly things were looted by adventurers from America, India and Africa. But this was not the only way in which capital came into being through robbery. In Britain itself, the whole series of “Enclosure Acts” stole the common lands for the benefit of the capitalist farmers. And in doing so, they deprived the peasantry

of their means of living, and thus turned them into proletarians – workers with no possibility of living except by working the land taken from them for the benefit of the new owner. Marx shows that this is the real origin of capital (“primitive accumulation”) and not the legend of abstemious men who “saved” from their meagre living, which he ridicules in the following passage (**Handbook of Marxism**, p. 376):

“This primitive accumulation plays in Political Economy about the same part as original sin in theology. Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race... In times long gone by there were two sorts of people; one the diligent, intelligent and, above all, frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living... Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter sort had at last nothing to sell except their own skins. And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority, that, despite all its labour, has up to now nothing to sell but itself, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly although they have long ceased to work.” But capital does not remain at the level of primitive accumulation; it has increased at an enormous rate. Even if the original capital was the product of direct robbery, what is the source of the additional capital piled up since that period?

Indirect robbery, Marx answers. Making the worker work more hours than is necessary for his keep, and appropriating the value of what he makes in those extra hours of work – the “surplus value.” The capitalist uses a part of this surplus value for his own maintenance; the balance is used as new capital – that is to say, he adds it to his previous capital, and is thus able to employ more workers and take more surplus value in the next turnover of production, which in turn means more capital – and so on **ad infinitum**.

Or, rather, it would go on to infinity but for the fact that other economic and social laws come into play. In the long run, the most important obstacle is the class struggle, which from time to time hinders the whole process and eventually ends it altogether by ending capitalist production. But there are many other obstacles to the smooth course of capitalist development, which also arise out of the nature of capitalism.

Economic crises occur which check the expansion of capital, and even lead to the destruction of part of the capital accumulated in previous years. “In these crises,” Marx says (**Handbook of Marx-**

ism, p. 29), “there broke out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity – the epidemic of over-production.” In feudal society, a bumper wheat harvest would have meant more food for everyone; in capitalist society, it may mean starvation for workers thrown out of employment because the wheat cannot be sold, and therefore less wheat is sown next year.

The features of capitalist crises are now only too familiar: there is over-production, therefore new production declines and workers are unemployed; their unemployment means a further decline in the market demand, so more factories slow down production; new factories are not put up, and some are even destroyed (shipyards on the north-east coast or cotton spindles and looms in Lancashire); wheat and other products are destroyed, though the unemployed and their families suffer hunger and illness. It is a madman’s world; but at last the stocks are used up or destroyed, production begins to increase, trade develops, there is more employment – and there is steady recovery for a year or two, leading to an apparently boundless expansion of production; until suddenly once more there is over-production and crisis, and the whole process begins again.

What is the cause of these crises? Marx answers: it is a law of capitalist production that each block of capital strives to expand – to make more profit, and therefore to produce and sell more products. The more capital, the more production. But at the same time, the more capital, the less labour-power employed: machinery takes the place of men (what we know now as “rationalisation” of industry). In other words, the more capital, the more production and the less wages, therefore the less demand for the products made. (It should perhaps be made clear that it need not be an **absolute** fall in total wages; usually the crisis comes from a relative fall, that is, total wages may actually increase in a boom, but they increase less than total production, so that demand falls behind output.)

This disproportion between the expansion of capital and the relative stagnation of the workers’ demand is the ultimate cause of crises. But, of course, the moment at which the crisis becomes apparent, and the particular way it develops, may depend on quite other factors – to take the most obvious example from Britain in 1939, a big armaments production (i.e. a Government “demand” which is right outside the normal capitalist process) may postpone and partially conceal for a time the inevitable crisis.

Then there is another most important factor in the development of capitalism – competition. Like all other factors in capitalist production, it has two contradictory results. On the one hand, because of competition to win larger sales of products, each capitalist enterprise is constantly trying to reduce production costs, especially by saving wages – through direct wage reductions or by speeding-up or other forms of rationalisation. On the other hand, those enterprises which succeed in getting enough capital to improve their technique and produce with less labour are thereby contributing to the general process described above – the reduction of demand owing to the total wages paid out being reduced.

Nevertheless, the enterprise which improves its technique makes a higher rate of profit for a time – until its competitors follow suit and also produce with less labour. But not all its competitors can follow suit. As the average concern gets larger and larger, greater amounts of capital are needed to modernise a plant, and the number of companies that can keep up the pace grows smaller. The other concerns go to the wall – they become bankrupt and are either taken over by their bigger competitors or are closed down altogether. “One capitalist kills many.” Thus in each branch of industry the number of separate concerns is steadily reduced: big trusts appear, which more or less dominate a particular field of industry. Thus out of capitalist competition comes its opposite – capitalist monopoly. This brings out new features, which are described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THE IMPERIALIST STAGE OF CAPITALISM

In popular usage, imperialism is a policy of expansion, of the conquest of less developed countries to form an Empire. In so far as the policy is seen to be more than an abstract desire to see the country's flag floating over as much territory as possible, it is recognised that there is some economic reason for the policy of expansion. It is sometimes said, for example, that the reason is a search for markets, or for raw materials and food, or for land where an overcrowded home population could find an outlet.

But none of these reasons is convincing, unless taken together with a much deeper analysis. Foreign countries can be perfectly good markets; the greater part of Britain's trade is still conducted with foreign countries, in spite of the vastness of the Empire. Raw materials and food supplies can always be obtained from foreign countries or their possessions; in fact, there is almost constantly an unsalable surplus desperately seeking a buyer. And as for land for settlement, large areas in the colonies are unsuitable for any European settlers; and where the land is suitable, settlers can hardly make a living better than in some foreign country. Thus the fascist arguments for expansion, which are sometimes repeated unthinkingly by pacifists and others, have no real foundation.

The first Marxist analysis of modern imperialism was made by Lenin. He pointed out that one of its special features was the export of capital, as distinct from the export of ordinary commodities; and he showed that this was the result of certain changes that had taken place within capitalism itself. He therefore described imperialism as a special stage of capitalism – the stage in which monopolies on a large scale had developed in the chief capitalist countries.

In the early days of industrial capitalism the factories, mines and other enterprises were very small. As a rule they were owned by a family group or a small group of partners, who were able to provide the relatively small amount of capital that was required to start up a factory or a mine. Each new technical development, however, made more capital necessary; while, on the other hand, the market for industrial products was constantly expanding – at the expense of handicraft production, first in Britain and then in other countries. The size of industrial enterprises therefore grew rapidly. With the invention of railways and steamships the iron, and later the steel,

industry developed, involving enterprises of much greater size. Whatever the industry, the larger enterprise was more economical to run, and tended to make more profits and expand more rapidly. Many of the smaller enterprises could not compete, and closed down or were absorbed by their more powerful rivals.

Thus a double process was constantly at work: production tended to be more and more concentrated in larger enterprises and the proportion of production controlled by a smaller number of very rich people was constantly increasing.

Marx was well aware of the process that was taking place even in his day, and called attention to the increasing technical concentration, i.e. the concentration of production in large units, secondly, to the concentration of capital in the ownership or control of a smaller and smaller group of individuals. He saw that the inevitable result would be the replacement of free competition by monopoly, and that this would bring out all the difficulties inherent in capitalism in a more intense form.

By the beginning of this century economic writers (especially J. A. Hobson in Britain) were noting the great degree of monopoly that had already been reached in many industries. During the war Lenin (in **Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism**) brought together the various facts already known about the growth of monopolies, and turned his attention to the political and social as well as the purely economic features of monopoly. On the basis of the developments since Marx's death, he was able to develop and extend the conclusions reached by Marx. Lenin showed that in the imperialist stage of capitalism, which he regarded as having developed by about 1900, there were five economic features to be noted:

(1) The concentration of production and of capital had developed to such an extent that it had created monopolies which played an important part in economic life.

This had taken place in every advanced capitalist country, but particularly in Germany and the United States. The process has, of course, continued at an increasing rate; in Britain monopolies have very greatly extended since the War. Such concerns as the London Transport Board, Imperial Chemical Industries and Unilever, each with capital nearly or over £100,000,000, are outstanding examples. (Marxists do not regard the London Transport Board or any similar so-called public bodies as in any sense socialist, since they are owned by private capitalists. They are simply monopolies, backed

by Parliament.) In every industry a very large proportion of the total trade is done by a few big concerns, which are usually linked together by agreements for price-fixing, quotas and so on, thus in effect exerting a joint monopoly.

(2) Bank capital had merged with industrial capital, creating a “finance-capital” oligarchy which virtually ruled each country.

This point requires some explanation. In the early days the industrial capitalists were distinct from the bankers, who had little or no direct interests in industrial concerns, although, of course, they lent money to them and took a share of the profits in the form of interest. But with the growth of industry and the wide establishment of the “share company,” the men who owned the banks also began to take shares in industrial companies, while the richer industrialists took shares in the banks. Thus the very richest capitalists, whether they started as bankers or industrialists, became banker-industrialists. This combination of capitalist functions in one and the same group enormously increased their power. (In Britain particularly, the big landowners also merged with this group.) The bank, working with an industrial concern with which it was linked in this way, could help that concern by lending it money, by making loans to other companies on condition that orders were placed with the concern in which the bank was interested, and so on. Thus the finance-capital group was able rapidly to increase its wealth and its monopoly control of one section of industry after another; and, needless to say, its voice received greater attention from the State.

The best illustration of the merging of the banks with industry is the increasing number of directorships in other concerns held by the directors of banks. Of course this does not mean that the banks own the other concerns; the point is that the powerful figures in the banking world are also the powerful figures in industry and trade – they form the same group of very rich men whose capital runs through the whole of British capitalism. In 1870 the directors of the banks which later became the “Big Five” and the Bank of England held 157 other directorships; in 1913 they held 329; in 1939 they held 1,150. The full force of these figures is all the greater when it is realised that the 1939 figure includes such concerns as London Transport and I.C.I., which themselves have swallowed large numbers of smaller enterprises.

(3) The export of capital, as distinguished from the export of commodities, grew in importance.

In the earlier period of capitalism, Britain exported textile and other manufactures to other countries, and with the proceeds bought local products, thus in effect exchanging her manufactures for the raw materials and food required for British industry. But in the second half of the last century, and particularly at its end, finance capital grew more and more concerned in exporting capital, with a view not to a trade exchange but to drawing interest on this capital from year to year. Such exports of capital – lending to foreign states or companies, or financing railways and harbour works, or mines in British possessions – were usually made on the condition that orders for materials, etc., were placed with the British industrial concerns with which the banks were connected. Thus the two wings of finance capital worked together, each getting very substantial profits and shutting out rivals from the transaction.

(4) International monopoly combines of capitalists were formed and divided up the world between them.

This took place in steel, oil and many other industries; it was agreed between the monopoly groups in different countries what share each should have in total foreign trade; often particular markets were allocated to each and fixed prices were agreed. The limits of such agreements are explained later.

(5) The territorial division of the world by the greatest Powers was virtually completed. (The percentage of Africa belonging to European Powers was 11 in 1876, and 90 in 1900.)

The importance of this was that the easy annexation of more or less defenceless countries could no longer continue. The finance-capital groups in the wealthiest States could no longer expand the territories they controlled except at each other's expense – that is to say, only by large-scale wars to re-divide the world in favour of the victorious state.

One of the special points made by Lenin in this connection is of particular interest today. The drive of each imperialist country for expansion had generally been treated as only aimed at colonial countries. Lenin pointed out that this was by no means essential; the drive was general, and in suitable circumstances would be directed against other states in Europe. The present drive of fascism from both Germany and Italy is a clear example of this.

On the basis of this whole analysis, the correctness of which has been confirmed by the experience of the last twenty-five years, Lenin drew the conclusion that the imperialist stage of capitalism

inevitably brought with it greater economic crises, wars on a world scale and, on the other hand, working-class revolutions and the revolt of oppressed peoples in the colonies and semi-colonial areas against exploitation by imperialists.

The concentration of capital in the hands of small groups also meant that these groups got more and more power over the State machine, so that the policy of the various countries became more closely associated with the interests of these narrow groups. It is this factor which makes it possible for the finance capital group in each country to fight their foreign rivals by tariffs, quotas and other State measures, and in the last resort by war.

Why is this conflict between rival groups inevitable? Why can they not agree to parcel out the world between themselves?

It was noted above that the monopoly groups in different countries make agreements to divide the markets of the world between them. In the abstract, this might seem to lead to the complete elimination of competition, and to a kind of international merging of interests of a permanent character. But Lenin brought forward facts to show that such international agreements were never lasting. An agreement made in 1905 would be on the basis of allocating the markets in relation to the producing power at that time of the different groups, say British, French, German and American. Unequal development, however, is a law of the growth of capital. Within a few years of such an agreement being made, the productive power of the German group, or of the American or another group, would have increased, and this group would no longer be content with its former allocation. It would denounce the agreement, and if the other groups did not immediately submit, a new and more bitter struggle for markets would begin. In fact, this is the fate of all such agreements; and as the law of unequal development applies not only to particular industrial groups, but to the capital of different countries as a whole, economic agreements are only, so to speak, armistices in a continuous trade war between the finance-capital groups of different countries.

The economic war in itself can bring no solution. Therefore the finance-capital groups, through the State machinery of their respective countries, set up tariff barriers against their rivals, fix quotas on imports, try to arrange preferential trading agreements with other countries, strive to extend the territory within which they exercise

their monopoly – and arm for the war in which victory will bring them at least a temporary superiority over their rivals.

Large-scale war, war between great Powers, has been the outcome of the concentration of wealth in the hands of finance-capital groups in each country. What is apparently a purely economic process – the concentration of production and of capital – leads straight to the terrible social calamity of war. But this is not the only social calamity which the laws of capitalist development produce. The enormous growth of the productive powers, coupled with the competition between the rival monopoly groups which quickens the pace of “rationalisation,” leads to a general crisis of capitalism. Except perhaps in a war, the productive powers are never fully in use. Even at the height of “boom” periods, masses of machinery and vast areas of land are unused, and millions of workers are unemployed. The accumulation of capital in the hands of a relatively small group has led to a state of things in which production is permanently set back; privately owned capital, which at one stage helped mankind to develop its productive powers, now acts as a barrier to further development.

And further social consequences follow. In the competitive struggle between the rival imperialist groups, the workers find that their conditions grow worse. Technical rationalisation – the use of labour-saving machinery – is accompanied by intense speeding up. The need for armaments and other preparations for war leads to the reduction, or at least holding back of development, in the social services. Unemployment and underemployment are widespread. The inevitable economic crises that follow each relative boom (relative, because production is only higher than the slump) are made the occasion for reducing wages. Hence the class struggle grows more acute: working-class revolution becomes a reality.

But there is another feature of the imperialist stage of capitalism which Lenin brought out in his analysis. The monopolist groups in imperialist countries are able to draw profits above the average from the exploitation of backward peoples. This is partly because of the low standard of living of these peoples, whose methods of production are primitive; partly because of the terrible conditions forced on them by completely callous rulers and capitalists; and partly because of the fact that the products of machine industry can be exchanged with handicraft products at a very specially high rate of exchange. This does not refer to money, but to the actual goods. It

will be remembered that the exchange value of any product is determined by the average socially necessary labour involved in the production. The socially necessary labour time, say in Britain, to produce one yard of cloth with machinery might be only one-tenth or one-twentieth of the time taken to produce one yard of cloth on a hand loom. But when the machine-made cloth enters India, it exchanges against the value of one yard of Indian cloth; in other words, it exchanges in India at very much above its value in Britain. By the time raw materials or other Indian products equal to this higher value are brought back to Britain and sold, there is a much higher profit than if the yard of cloth had been sold in Britain. Even where the type of machinery is the same, different levels of skill produce their effect, and result in an extra profit. This extra profit, of course, applies to all transactions of this kind, not only to cloth, with the result that enormous fortunes are made by the finance-capital groups. Such immense fortunes as the Ellerman £40,000,000 and the Yule £20,000,000 come largely from this extra profit.

This extra profit arising from the exploitation of the colonial peoples has a special importance in relation to the labour movement. Marx had already pointed out that the British capitalist class, having been first in the field in selling machine-made products throughout the world, had been able to respond to the pressure of the British working class for better conditions, so far as the upper sections of skilled workers were concerned. Thus some sections of skilled engineers and cotton workers of Britain had secured far higher standards of living than workers in other countries, and along with this they tended to identify their interests with the capitalist exploitation of the colonies. Lenin showed that this occurred in each advanced industrial country when it reached the imperialist stage, and that sections of workers in a relatively privileged position, especially the leaders of these sections, tended to become “opportunists,” that is, to come to terms with the capitalists on behalf of their own sections, without considering the conditions of the great mass of the workers in the country. This tendency became stronger as the imperialist stage developed, with the result that the leading sections of the labour and socialist movement became closely identified with the imperialist policy of the finance-capital group in their own country. During the War this was made clear by the association of the official labour movement everywhere (except in Russia, where the Bolsheviks remained Marxists) with the imperialist war.

This “opportunist” outlook, the identification of their own interests with those of the ruling class and consequently their rejection of the class struggle, is the main basis for the abandonment by the socialist movement in many countries of the standpoint of Marxism, and for the hostility shown by the official movement to the Communist Party, which adheres to the outlook of Marxism.

In the imperialist stage the colonial struggle for liberation also becomes more determined and widespread. The conquest and capitalist penetration of a colonial country break up the old form of production, and destroy the basis on which large numbers of the people lived. Competition from Lancashire mills destroyed the livelihood of the Indian hand-loom workers, driving them back to agriculture and increasing the pressure on the land. In the imperialist stage the pressure on the whole people is increased by taxation to meet the interest on loans and to maintain the apparatus of imperial rule, both civil and military. As a result of this double pressure on the land and the forcing down of prices of colonial products in the period of the general crisis of capitalism, poverty and literal starvation provide the basis for constant peasant struggles. In the towns industrial production is carried on under appalling conditions; working-class organisation is hampered and where possible suppressed. The middle classes, especially the intelligentsia, feel the restrictive bonds of imperial rule. Even the rising Indian capitalists see their development restricted. Thus a wide movement for independence grows. The same process goes on, though in different conditions, in every colonial country. The recent widespread strikes in the West Indies are evidence of this.

Marxists see these struggles as the inevitable result of capitalist exploitation, and that they will only end with the overthrow of the imperialist groups. They therefore make common cause with the colonial peoples against their common enemy, the finance-capital group in the imperialist country.

Thus the imperialist stage of capitalism, the stage in which capitalism is most concentrated and most organised, is also the stage when all the conflicts inherent in capitalist society come to the surface. It is the stage when economic crises and wars are also accompanied by violent struggles against the ruling class: struggles which culminate in the overthrow of the ruling class and the end of capitalism.

CHAPTER V

CLASS STRUGGLES IN MODERN TIMES

In Chapter II Marx's general theory of class struggle was described. Class struggles arise out of a form of production which divides society into classes, one of which carries out the actual process of production (slave, serf, wage-worker), while the other (slaveowner, lord, capitalist employer) enjoys a part of the product without having to work to produce it. But in addition to the two main classes in each epoch there are also other classes – in the main, survivals of earlier forms of production, like the rulers of the Indian states and the peasant-producer of today; or, as the early artisans in the feudal period, the forerunners of the dominant capitalist class of later period.

The struggle between the classes helps man forward to a higher stage of production. When a successful revolution takes place, the higher form of production is brought in or widely extended. The way for the further development of capitalism in Britain was opened by the Cromwell revolution and the “Glorious Revolution” of 1689; the same service was rendered to France by the Great Revolution of 1789 and the subsequent revolutions.

Marx, however, was not content to state the facts in general terms: he closely examined the struggles of his day, in order to discover the laws of the struggle between classes.

This is not a question of the technical details of fighting. Marx saw that what was important for an understanding of social development was the analysis of the class forces which take part in the revolutionary movement that develops a new form of production. And it was possible for him to show, by examining particularly the revolutionary events of 1848 in many countries of Europe, that certain general features applied to all.

What are these general features or laws evident in revolutions?

In the first place, the revolutionary struggle is always conducted by the class which is coming to power in the new system of production, but not by it alone. For example, alongside of the rising capitalist class in the Great French Revolution of 1789, there were the peasantry – the producing class of feudalism – small traders, independent artisans and the rudiments of the working class of the future. All of these sections of the population took part in the revolutionary struggle against the ruling class of the old order, because, in

spite of divergent interests, all of them realised that the old order meant continued repression, continued and increasing difficulties for them.

It was much the same in the other European revolutions which came later, overthrowing the absolute power of the feudal monarch in many countries and clearing the road for capitalist production. All other sections of the people were more or less united against the former ruling class. And in the early stages it was always the new ruling class – the rising capitalist class – which led the revolution. In the course of the struggle, particularly where the working class had already reached a certain stage of development, new alliances were formed. The working sections of the people, which entered the struggle in their own interests, put forward claims which the new capitalist rulers were not prepared to grant. In such cases the working sections of the people would try to enforce its claims, and the capitalists would turn to the more reactionary sections for help against the workers. Something very much like this happened even in Cromwell's day, and happened in France repeatedly up to 1848.

In June, 1848, the Paris workers attempted to defend their newly-won rights. but were defeated by the new capitalist government set up by the February revolution; Marx, however, noted that the working class of Paris was already so developed that in the next revolution it would **lead**, and not merely follow the lead of the capitalists. This actually occurred in 1871, when the Paris workers took the lead in establishing the Commune, which held Paris for ten weeks. But the fact that for the first time the working class led the revolutionary action did not mean that the working class fought alone. They rose against the Government of large landowners and capitalists who had plunged France into war and were trying to enrich themselves out of defeat and the starvation of the Paris people. And alongside of the workers in the fight against the large landowners and capitalists stood: small shopkeepers who were threatened with ruin by the Government's refusal of a moratorium on debts and rent; patriots from all classes who were disgusted with the German victory in the war and the terms accepted by the Government; even capitalist republicans who feared that the Government would restore the monarchy. One of the chief weaknesses in the position of the Paris workers was that they did not seriously attempt to bring the peasantry also to their side.

But the important point remained: every real revolution which aims at overthrowing an existing ruling class is not a revolution only of the class which is to succeed it in power, but a revolution of all who are oppressed or restricted by the existing ruling class. At a certain stage of development the revolution is led by the capitalists against the feudal monarchy and landowners; but when the working class has developed it is able to lead all the sections taking part in the revolution. In other words, history shows that in every revolution wide sections of the people form an alliance against the main enemy; what is new is that in the revolution against the large landowners and capitalists the working class takes the lead in such an alliance.

The revolution which puts a new class in power to bring in a new system of production is only the high point of the continuous struggle between the classes, which is due to their conflicting interests in production. In the early stages of industrial capitalism, the conflicts are scattered, and are almost entirely on issues of wages and conditions in a particular factory. “But with the development of industry the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more” (Marx, **Communist Manifesto**, 1848; **Handbook of Marxism**, p. 32). The workers form trade unions, which develop into great organisations capable of carrying on the conflict on a national scale. They form co-operative societies to protect their interests as consumers. And at a relatively advanced stage they form their own political party, which is able to represent and lead the fight for their interests as a class.

How is this fight conducted?

Marx saw the aim of the working-class party as the preparation for and organisation of revolution – the overthrow of the ruling class of capitalists – and the organisation of a new system of production, socialism.

The process of preparation involved helping all forms of working-class organisation to develop, especially the trade unions, which increased the strength of the working class and made it “feel that strength more.” It also involved helping every section of the workers which entered into any struggle for its immediate interests – for higher wages, better working conditions and so on. Through these struggles the workers often win better conditions; but these are not secure – “the real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate re-

sult, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers.” In the course of these struggles the workers become conscious of the fact that they are a class, with common interests as against the capitalist class. The working-class political Party helps forward that development, and explains why, so long as capitalist production continues, the struggle between classes must also go on, while economic crises and wars inflict terrible sufferings on the workers; but that the conflict and sufferings can be ended by changing the system of production, which, however, involves the forcible overthrow of the capitalist class.

Why did Marx consider the “forcible overthrow” necessary? In Chapter II his analysis of history has been explained, with the conclusion that new systems of production only come into operation when a new class, by forcible means, takes power from the former ruling class. The conclusion to be drawn from history is therefore that the working class is not able to change production on to a socialist basis without the forcible overthrow of the ruling class. This general historical conclusion is reinforced by Marx’s study of the State.

The State is sometimes thought of as parliament. But Marx showed that the historical development of the State had little to do with representative institutions; on the contrary, the State was something through which the will of the ruling class was imposed on the rest of the people. In primitive society there was no State; but when human society became divided into classes, the conflict of interests between the classes made it impossible for the privileged class to maintain its privileges without an armed force directly controlled by it and protecting its interests. “This public force exists in every State; it consists not merely of armed men, but of material appendages, prisons and repressive institutions of all kinds” (Engels, **Handbook of Marxism**, p. 726). This public force always has the function of maintaining the existing order, which means the existing class division and class privilege; it is always represented as something above society, something “impartial,” whose only purpose is to “maintain law and order,” but in maintaining law and order it is maintaining the existing system. It comes into operation against any attempt to change the system; in its normal, everyday working, the State machine arrests and imprisons “seditious” people, stops “seditious” literature, and so on, by apparently peaceful means; but when the movement is of a wider character, force is used openly by the

police and, if necessary, the armed forces. It is this apparatus of force, acting in the interests of the ruling class, which is the State.

Is the State machine controlled by the Parliament or other representative institution of the country? So long as the representative institution of the country represents only the ruling class, it may be in control of the State machine. But when the Parliament or other institution does not adequately represent the ruling class, and attempts to carry through any measure disturbing to the ruling class, the fact that it does not control the State machine soon becomes obvious. History is full of representative institutions which have attempted to serve the interests of a class other than the ruling class; they have been closed down, or dispersed by armed force where necessary. Whereas, for example, in Britain in Cromwell's time – the rising class has triumphed over the old order, it has not done so by mere votes in Parliament, but by organising a new armed force against the State, against the armed force of the old ruling class.

It was obvious to Marx that the extension of the vote did not in any way alter this situation. Real power rests with the class which is dominant in the system of production; it maintains its control of the State machine, no matter what happens in the representative institution. A change of real power therefore involves the use of force against the old State machine, whose whole apparatus of force is turned against the new class which is trying to change the system.

This conclusion reached by Marx has been confirmed by more recent historical events. The whole basis of fascism is the destruction by armed force of all forms of representative institution. The fact that the fascist organisation is a new form, and not merely the old form of State force, alters nothing in the main analysis. The Franco rebellion against a constitutionally elected parliamentary government shows how little control a representative institution has over the State machine.

But how does the ruling class maintain its separate control of the State machine, and especially the armed forces which, on the surface and "constitutionally," are controlled by Parliament? The answer is to be found in the character of the State machine itself. In every country, the higher posts in the armed forces, in the judicial system, and in the administrative services generally, are held by members or trusted servants of the ruling class. This is assured by the system of appointment and promotion. However far democracy may go in the representative institution, it is unable to penetrate into

the tough core of the State machine. So long as no serious issues arise, the fact that the State machine is separated from the democratic Parliament is not obvious; but even in Britain we have the example of the mutiny at the Curragh in 1914, when officers refused to carry out an order to garrison Northern Ireland in view of the threatened reactionary rebellion against the Irish Home Rule Act.

But if the State machine works only to preserve the status quo and not against it, it is clear that no advance to a higher form of production is possible without the defeat of the State machine, no matter what representative institutions exist.

Nevertheless, Marx was always a supporter of democratic institutions. He saw them historically as one of the fields of the class struggle. Just as Parliament in the days of Charles I served as a sounding-board for the rising capitalist class, through which it won concessions while at the same time it roused support for the fight against the feudal monarchy, so also the Parliaments of today can serve as instruments for winning concessions and at the same time rousing the workers for the decisive struggle for power. Therefore the struggle for parliamentary democracy is not purposeless, even if it is only a part of the whole struggle and cannot by itself bring the new order of society. (It is significant that fascism everywhere destroys parliamentary institutions, just because of the opportunities they give to the people's opposition.)

That is why Marx always stressed the importance of the fight for parliamentary democracy against the various forms of autocratic government existing in Europe during the last century, and for the extension of democratic rights in countries where the autocracy had already been overthrown. At the same time, he considered that so long as the autocracy or the capitalist class remained in control of the State (in the meaning explained above) democracy is neither secure nor effective. It is only when the working class has succeeded in defeating and smashing the capitalist State machine that it can raise itself to the position of ruling class, and thereby "win the battle of democracy." In other words, the people's will can only prevail effectively when the armed barrier in its way – the capitalist State machine – has been destroyed.

But it is not enough to defeat and destroy the State machine of the former ruling class. It is necessary for the working class to set up its own State machine – its own centralised apparatus of force –

in order to complete the defeat of the capitalist class and to defend the new system against attacks from within and from without.

Moreover, it is necessary for the working class to set up its own form of government, which differs in important respects from the form known in capitalist society, because its purpose is different. This became clear to Marx after the experience of the Paris Commune in 1871, the special features of which were that: it was “a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time;” its members could be replaced by their electors at any time; “from the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at workmen’s wages;” magistrates and judges were elected, and their electors could replace them at any time. The old standing army was replaced by a “National Guard, the bulk of which consisted of working men.” The essence of these and other features of the Commune was to bring the governing apparatus and the machinery of force and repression nearer to the working class – to ensure its control which had in fact existed over the old machine. This new form of State was “winning the battle of democracy” – it was an enormous extension of the share taken by the common people in the actual control of their own lives.

Yet Engels, writing of the Paris Commune, said: “That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.” Is there any contradiction between the two statements about the Commune: that it was a great extension of democratic control as compared with parliamentary democracy under capitalism; on the other hand, that it was a working-class dictatorship? No. They simply express two aspects of the same thing. In order to carry out the will of the overwhelming majority of the people, a “new and really democratic State” was set up; but this could only carry out the people’s will by exercising a dictatorship, by using force against the minority who had been the class exercising its dictatorship and continued to use all means – from financial sabotage to armed resistance – against the people’s will.

The later experiences of working-class revolution confirmed the deductions which Marx and Engels had drawn from the experience of the Commune in 1871. In the 1905 revolution in Russia, councils composed of delegates from working-class bodies were set up to organise and carry on the fight against the Tsar; and again in the March revolution of 1917 similar “soviets” (the Russian word for “council”) were formed as soon as the revolutionary situation developed. Lenin saw that, with the great development of the working

class since the Paris Commune, these delegate bodies drawn in the first place from the factories (but also, as the struggle extended, from the soldiers and the peasants), were the form in which the new working-class State would operate. The delegates were drawn directly from the workers, and could at any time be recalled by their electors; this meant that capitalist influences could play no part in decisions, and that therefore the real interests of the working class would be protected and advanced. At the same time, this could only be done by a dictatorship, resting on force, against the old ruling class, which used every means to undermine and destroy the new Soviet Government.

The real democracy of the working-class dictatorship was brought out by Marx in a passage in the **Communist Manifesto** of 1848: "All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interests of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority."

It is evident from what has been said above that Marx did not consider that the victory of the working-class revolution would at once end all class struggle. On the contrary, it merely marks a turning point in which the working class for the first time has the State apparatus on its side instead of against it. Lenin told the Congress of Soviets in January, 1918, an incident which illustrates this point. He was in a train, and there was a conversation going on which he could not understand. Then one of the men turned to him and said: "Do you know the curious thing this old woman said? She said: 'Now there is no need to fear the man with the gun. I was in the woods one day and I met a man with a gun, and instead of taking the firewood I had collected from me, he helped me to collect more'." The apparatus of force was no longer turned against the workers, but helped the workers; it would be turned only against those who tried to hold back the workers.

And such people, of course, continue to exist after the working class has taken power. The old ruling class, aided by the ruling class of other countries, gathers together such armed forces as it can raise, and carries on open warfare against the working-class State. The Paris Commune of 1871 was defeated in this way. The Germans released thousands of French prisoners taken in the war, and sent them to reinforce the French reactionaries at Versailles, outside Paris; and the reactionary army was able to take Paris from the

Commune and carry out an appalling slaughter of those who had supported the Commune. Between 1918 and 1920, the Soviet Government in Russia had to face, not only armies of Tsarist supporters, but also invading armies of foreign powers – Britain, France and the United States included. History therefore confirms the conclusion made by Marx, the working class would have to maintain its State organisation for a long period after it has taken power, in order to defend itself and to ensure its control during the period when it is reorganising the system of production on to a socialist basis.

What exactly Marx meant by socialism and its higher stage, communism, is explained in the following chapter. But before leaving the subject of the class struggle and the State, Marx's view of the final outcome of the process must be stated. Class struggle, and with it the setting up of a State apparatus to protect the interests of the ruling class, came out of the division of human society into classes whose interests clashed in production. Class struggle and the State continue through history as long as human society remains divided in classes. But when the working class takes power it does so in order to end the class divisions – to bring in a new form of production in which there is no longer any class living on the labour of another class; in other words, to bring about a classless society, in which all serve society as a whole. When this process has been completed (on a world scale), there will be no class conflict because there are no classes with separate interests, and therefore there will be no need of a State – an apparatus of force – to protect one set of interests against another. The State will “wither away” – in one sphere after another it will not be required, and such central machinery as exists will be for the organisation of production and distribution. As Engels put it: “Government over persons is replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the processes of production.”

CHAPTER VI

SOCIALIST SOCIETY

Nowhere in Marx's writings is there to be found a detailed account of the new social system which was to follow capitalism. Marx wrote no "Utopia" of the kind that earlier writers had produced – writings based only on the general idea of a society from which the more obvious evils of the society in which they lived had been removed. But from the general laws of social development Marx was able to outline the features of the new society and the way in which it would develop.

Perhaps the most striking, although in a sense the most obvious, point made by Marx was that the organisation of the new society would not begin, so to speak, on a clearer field. Therefore it was futile to think in terms of a society "which has developed on its own foundations." It was not a question of thinking out the highest possible number of good features and mixing them together to get the conception of a socialist society which we would then create out of nothing. Such an approach was totally unscientific, and the result could not possibly conform to reality.

On the contrary, an actual socialist society, like all previous forms of society, would only come into existence on the basis of what already existed before it; that is to say, it would be a society "just emerging from capitalist society, and which therefore in all respects – economic, moral and intellectual – still bears the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it sprung."

In fact, it is the actual development within capitalist society which prepares the way for socialism, and indicates the character of the change. Production becomes increasingly social, in the sense that more and more people are associated in the making of every single thing; factories get larger and larger, and the process of production links together a very large number of people in the course of transforming raw materials into the finished article. There is greater and greater interdependence between people; the old feudal ties and connections have long been broken by capitalism, but in its development capitalism has built new connections of a far wider character – so wide that every individual becomes more or less dependent on what happens to society as a whole.

But although this is the steady tendency of capitalist production, the fact is that the product, made by the co-operative work of

society, is the property of an individual or group and not the property of society. The first step in building up a socialist society must therefore be to give society the product which it has made; and this means that society as a whole must own the means of production – the factories, mines, machinery, ships, etc., which under capitalism are privately owned.

But this socialisation of the means of production itself takes place only on the basis of what the new society inherits from the old. And it is only the relatively large concerns which are so to speak ready to be taken over by society. Capitalist development has prepared them for this. There is already a complete divorce between the owners and the production process in such concerns; the only link is the dividend or interest paid by the concern to the shareholders. Production is carried on by a staff of workers and employees; the transfer of ownership to society as a whole does not alter their work. Therefore these large concerns can be taken over immediately.

The position is different in the case of smaller enterprises, especially in those where the owner himself plays an important part in production. It is obvious that the management of a large number of separate small factories is a very difficult thing – in fact, it is impossible in the early stages of a working-class government. What is essential is to prepare the way for the centralised management of these smaller enterprises, including both town industries and small farms.

What practical steps in this direction can be taken? The general method is to encourage co-operation, as a first step, so that these small producers learn to produce in common, and one productive unit takes the place of scores of smaller ones. Engels showed this in relation to small-holders, in regard to whom he wrote:

“Our task will first of all consist in transforming their individual production and individual ownership into cooperative production and co-operative ownership, not forcibly, but by way of example, and by offering social aid for this purpose” (**Handbook of Marxism**, p. 564).

This transformation, “not forcibly, but by way of example, and by offering social aid,” is the essential basis of the Marxist approach to the building up of a socialist society. Of course, as shown in the previous chapter, Marx saw that the former ruling class would not quietly accept the changed conditions, and would carry on the class

struggle as long as they could in the effort to restore the old order; the working class therefore needed a State apparatus of force to meet such attacks and defeat them. But the process of building the new society was an **economic** process, not dependent on the use of force.

Hence it follows that, once the working class has broken the resistance of the former ruling class and has established its own control, it takes over the larger enterprises, the banks, the railways and other “commanding heights:..” of industry and trade, but does not at once take over **all** production and trade, and therefore does not force everyone to accept socialism on the morrow of the revolution. What the revolution immediately achieves therefore is not and could not be socialism, but working-class power to build socialism. And it must be many years before the building is completed, and all production and distribution is on a socialist basis.

The first essential feature of socialism is that the means of production are taken from private ownership and used for society as a whole. But the Marxist basis of this is not any ethical “principle.” It is simply that private ownership of the means of production in fact checks production, prevents the full use of the productive powers which man has created. Therefore the transfer of ownership to society as a whole is only the clearing of the ground; the next step is the conscious, planned development of the productive forces.

It is a mistake to think that this development is only necessary in a backward industrial country such as Russia was in 1917. Marx was thinking of advanced industrial countries when he wrote that after taking power “the proletariat will use its political supremacy... to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.” And although these productive resources, for example in Britain, have increased enormously since Marx’s day, the fact is that they are still backward in relation to what scientific knowledge today makes possible. They are backward because of the capitalist system – because economic crises constantly check production; because production is for the market, and as the market is restricted under capitalism, the growth of the productive forces is restricted; because monopoly buys up technical inventions, and prevents them from being widely used; because production cannot be planned, and so there is no systematic growth; because capitalism has kept agriculture separate and backward; because capitalism has to devote enormous resources for wars between rival groups, wars against the colonial peoples;

because capitalism separates manual from mental work, and therefore does not open the floodgates of invention; because the class struggle absorbs an enormous amount of human energy; because capitalism leaves millions unemployed.

Therefore the factories and the mines, the power-stations and the railways, agriculture and fishing can and must be reorganised and made more up-to-date, so that a far higher level of production can be reached. What is the object of this? To raise the standard of living of the people.

One of the favourite arguments of the anti-socialists used to be that if everything produced in Britain was divided up equally, this would make very little difference in the standard of living of the workers. Even if this were true – and it is not – it has absolutely nothing to do with Marx's conception of socialism. Marx saw that socialism would raise the level of production to undreamed-of heights. It is not merely because Tsarist Russia was backward that industrial production in the Soviet Union in 1938 was over eight times the pre-war level; even in industrial Britain an enormous increase could and would be made.

This increase in the level of production, and therefore in the standard of living of the people, is the material basis on which the intellectual and cultural level of the people will be raised.

But the whole development requires planned production. In capitalist society, new factories are built and production of any particular article is increased when a higher profit can be made by this increase. And it does not by any means follow that the higher profit means that the article in question is needed by the people. The demand may come from a tiny section of very rich people; or some exceptional circumstances may raise prices for one article. Where profit is the motive force, there can be only anarchy in production, and the result is constant over-production in one direction and under-production in another.

In socialist society, where production is not for profit but for use, a plan of production is possible. In fact, it is possible even before industry is fully socialised. As soon as the main enterprises are socialised, and the others are more or less regulated, a plan of production can be made – a plan that grows more accurate every year.

So we see that Marx saw socialism as implying, in the economic field, ownership of the means of production by society as a whole; a rapid increase in the productive forces, planned produc-

tion. And it is the character of the plan of production that contains the secret of why there cannot be any over-production under socialism in spite of the fact that the means of production are always being increased.

The national plan of production consists of two parts: the plan for new means of production – buildings, machinery, raw materials, etc., – and the plan for articles of consumption, not only food and clothing but also education, health services, entertainment, sport and so on, besides administration. So long as defence forces are required, these must also be provided for in the plan.

There can never be over-production, because the total output of articles of consumption is then allocated to the people – that is to say, total wages and allowances of all kinds are fixed to equal the total price of articles of consumption. There may, of course, be bad planning – provision may be made one year for more bicycles than the people want and too few boots. But such defects are easily remedied by an adjustment of the next plan, so that the balance is righted. It is always only a case of adjusting production between one thing and another – never of reducing total production, for total consumption never falls short of total production of consumption goods. As planned production of these rises, so does their planned distribution.

But they are not divided out in kind among the people. The machinery used is the distribution of money to the people, in the form of wages or allowances. As the prices of the consumption goods are fixed, the total wages and allowances paid can be made equal to the total price of the consumption goods. There is never any discrepancy between production and consumption – the people have everything that is available. Increased production means increasing the quantity of goods available and therefore the quantity taken by the people.

The part played by prices in socialist society is often misunderstood. In the capitalist system, price fluctuations indicate the relation between supply and demand. If prices rise, this means the supply is too small; if prices fall, the supply is too great and must be reduced. Prices therefore act as the regulator of production. But in socialist society prices are simply a regulator of consumption; production goes according to plan and prices are deliberately fixed, so that what is produced will be consumed.

How is the total output of consumption goods shared out among the people? It is a complete misconception to think that Marx ever held that the products would be shared out equally. Why not? Because a socialist society is not built up completely new, but on the foundations it inherits from capitalism. To share out equally would be to penalise everyone whose standard of living had been above the average. The skilled workers, whose work in increasing production is in fact more important for society than the work of the unskilled labourer, would be penalised. Equality based on the unequal conditions left by capitalism would therefore not be just, but unjust. Marx was quite clear on this point; he wrote: "Rights, instead of being equal, must be unequal ... Justice can never rise superior to the economic conditions of society and the cultural development conditioned by them."

Men who have just emerged from capitalist society are in fact unequal, and must be treated unequally if society is to be fair to them. On the other hand, society only has this obligation to them if they serve society. Therefore "he that does not work, neither shall he eat." And it follows also from this that the man who does more useful work for society also is given a higher standard of living. The distribution of the total products available for consumption is therefore based on the principle: from each according to his ability, to each according to his work.

But socialist society does not remain at the level inherited from capitalism; it raises production each year, and at the same time it raises the technical skill and the cultural development of the people. And the inequality of wages – the fact that skilled and culturally developed people get more than the unskilled – acts as an incentive to everyone to raise his or her qualifications. In turn the higher skill means more production – there is more to go round, and this enables everyone's standard of living to be raised. Inequality in a socialist society is therefore a lever by which the whole social level is raised, not, as in capitalism, a weapon for increasing the wealth of the few and the poverty of the many.

Did Marx consider that this inequality would be a permanent feature of the future society? No, in the sense that a stage would be reached when it was no longer necessary to give people a share proportionate to the service they render to society.

After all, to divide up the product according to work done or any other principle is to confess that there is not enough to satisfy

everyone's needs. In capitalist society a family which is able to afford as much bread as all members of the family need does not share out a loaf on any principle: every member of the family takes what he or she needs. And when production in a socialist society has risen to such a height that all citizens can take what they need without anyone going short, there is no longer the slightest point in **measuring** and **limiting** what anyone takes. When that stage is reached, the principle on which production and distribution are based becomes: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.

It is the point at which this becomes possible that distinguishes communism from socialism. Socialism, as Marx used the term, is the first stage, when the means of production are owned by the people and therefore there is no longer any exploitation of man by man, but before planned socialist production has raised the country's output to such a height that everyone can have what he needs.

But the stage of communism implies much more than merely material sufficiency. From the time when the working class takes power and begins the change to socialism, a change also begins to take place in the outlook of the people. All kinds of barriers which under capitalism seemed rigid grow weaker and are finally broken down. Education and all opportunities for development are open to all children equally, no matter what the status or income of their parents may be. "Caste" differences no longer count. Children learn to use their hands as well as their brains. And this equalisation of physical and mental work gradually spreads through the whole people. Everyone becomes an "intellectual," while intellectuals no longer separate themselves off from physical work.

Women are no longer looked on as inferior or unable to play their part in every sphere of the life of society. Special measures are taken to make it easier for them to work. Creches are established at the factories, in the blocks of flats, and so on, so that mothers can have greater freedom. The work of women in the home is reduced by communal kitchens, laundries and restaurants. There is no compulsion on women to work, but they are given facilities which make work easy for them.

The barriers between national groups are broken down. There are no "subject races" in a socialist society; no one is treated as superior or inferior because of his colour or nationality. All national

groups are helped to develop their economic resources as well as their literary and artistic traditions.

Democracy is not limited to voting for a representative in parliament every five years. In every factory, in every block of flats, in every aspect of life, men and women are shaping their own lives and the destiny of their country. More and more people are drawn into some sphere of public life, given responsibility for helping themselves and others. This is a much fuller, more real democracy than exists anywhere else.

The difference between the town and the countryside is broken down. The workers in the villages learn to use machinery and raise their technical skill to the level of the town workers. Educational and cultural facilities formerly available only in the towns grow up in the countryside.

In a word, on the basis of the changes in material conditions which socialism brings, vast changes also take place in the development and outlook of men and women. They will be people with “an all-round development, an all-round training, people who will be able to do everything.”

Above all, the self-seeking, individualist outlook bred by capitalism will have been replaced by a really social outlook, a sense of responsibility to society; as Marx put it: “labour has become not only a means of living, but itself the first necessity of life.” In that stage of society, Communist society, there will no longer be any need for incentives or inducements to work, because the men and women of that day will have **no other outlook** than playing their part in the further development of society.

Is this Utopian? It could only be regarded as Utopian by people who do not understand the materialist basis of Marxism, which has been touched on in Chapter II. Human beings have no fixed characteristics and outlook, eternally permanent. In primitive tribal society, even in those forms of it which have survived to recent times, the sense of responsibility to the tribe is very great. In later society, after the division of society into classes, the sense of social responsibility was broken down, but still showed itself in a certain feeling of responsibility to the class. In capitalist society there is the most extreme disintegration of social responsibility: the system makes “every man for himself” the main principle of life.

But even within capitalist society there is what is known as “solidarity” among the workers – the sense of a common interest, a

common responsibility. This is not an idea which someone has thought of and put into the heads of workers: it is an idea which arises out of the material conditions of working-class life, the fact that they get their living in the same way, working alongside each other. The typical grasping individualist, on the other hand, the man with no sense of social or collective responsibility, is the capitalist surrounded by competitors, all struggling to survive by killing each other. Of course, the ideas of the dominant class – the competition and rivalry instead of solidarity – tend to spread among the workers, especially among those who are picked out by the employers for special advancement of any kind. But the fundamental basis for the outlook of any class (as distinct from individuals) is the material conditions of life, the way it gets its living.

Hence it follows that the outlook of people can be changed by changing their material conditions, the way in which they get their living. No example could be better than the change which has been brought about in the outlook of the peasantry in the Soviet Union. Everyone who wrote of the peasant in Tsarist Russia described his self-seeking, grasping individualism. Critics of the revolution used to assert that the peasant could never be converted to socialism, that the revolution would be broken by the peasantry. And it is perfectly true that the outlook of the peasantry was so limited, so fixed by their old conditions of life, that they could never have been “converted” to socialism by arguments, or forced into socialism by compulsion. What these critics did not understand, as they were not Marxists, was that a model farm, a tractor station near them, would make them see in practice that better crops were got by large-scale methods. They were won for machinery and methods which could only be operated by breaking down their individual landmarks and working the land collectively. And this in turn broke down the separatism of their outlook. Now they are settling down to a collective basis of living, and they are becoming a new type of peasantry – a collective peasantry, with a sense of collective responsibility, which is already some distance along the road to a social outlook.

When therefore the material basis in any country is socialist production and distribution, when the way in which all the people get their living is by working for society as a whole, then the sense of social responsibility so to speak develops naturally; people no longer need to be convinced that the social principle is right. It is not a question of an abstract moral duty having to establish itself

over the instinctive desires of “human nature;” human nature itself is transformed by practice, by custom.

Up to this point we have not considered the implications of socialist or communist society covering the whole world. But Marx’s whole account of socialist society shows that it will mean the end of wars. When production and distribution in each country are organised on a socialist basis, there will be no group in any country which will have the slightest interest in conquering other countries. A capitalist country conquers some relatively backward country to extend the capitalist system, to open up new chances for profitable investments by the finance-capital group; to get new contracts for railways and docks, perhaps for new mining machinery; to obtain new sources of cheap raw materials and new markets. But for an advanced industrial socialist country to conquer by force of arms some backward country would be simply ridiculous; to extend the socialist system to that backward country would mean lowering the standard of living of the advanced socialist country. Once again, it is not a question of morals; socialist societies will not make war because there is nothing they, or any groups within them, can gain from war.

For the same reason no socialist State is in the least interested in holding back any backward country. On the contrary, the more every country develops its industry and cultural level, the better it will be for all the other socialist countries, the higher the standard of living throughout the world, the richer the content of life. Therefore those socialist countries which are industrially advanced will help the more backward countries to develop, not hold them back and, of course, not exploit them in any way.

In such a world socialist system the further advance that man could make defies the imagination. With all economic life planned in every country, and a world plan co-ordinating the plans of each separate country, with scientific discoveries and technical inventions shared out at once between all countries, with the exchange of every form of cultural achievement, man would indeed take giant’s strides forward.

Towards what? Marx never attempted to foretell, because the conditions are too unknown for any scientific forecast. But this much is clear: with the establishment of communism throughout the world, the long chapter of man’s history of class divisions and class struggles will have come to an end. There will be no new division into classes, chiefly because in a communist society there is nothing

to give rise to it. The division into classes at a time when men's output was low served to provide organisers and discoverers of higher productive forces; the class division continued to fulfil this function, and under capitalism it helped the concentration of production and the vast improvements in technique.

But at the stage when man has equipped himself with such vast productive forces that only a couple of hours' work a day is necessary, the division into classes can well end, and must end. From that point on, man will resume his struggle with nature, but with the odds on his side. No longer trying to win nature with magic, or avert natural disasters with prayer, no longer blindly groping his way through class struggles and wars, but sure of himself, confident of his power to control the forces of nature and to march on – that is man in communist society as pictured by Marx.

CHAPTER VII

THE MARXIST VIEW OF NATURE

The point has already been made that Marxism regards human beings, and therefore human society, as a part of nature. Man's origin is therefore to be found in the development of the world; man developed out of previous forms of life, in the course of whose evolution thought and conscious action made their appearance. This means that matter, reality that is not conscious, existed before mind, reality that is conscious. But this also means that matter, external reality, exists independently of the mind. This view of nature is known as "materialism."

The opposite view, the view that the external world is not real, that it has existence only in the mind, or in the mind of some supreme being, is known as idealism. There are many forms of idealism, but all of them assert that mind, whether human or divine, is the primary reality and that matter, if it has any reality at all, is secondary.

To the Marxists, as Engels put it, "the materialist world outlook is simply the conception of nature as it is, without any reservations." The external world is real, it exists independently of whether we are conscious of it or not, and its motion and development are governed by laws which are capable of being discovered and used by man, but are not directed by any mind.

Idealism, on the other hand, because it regards matter, external reality, as having only secondary reality, if indeed it is in any sense real, also holds that we can never know reality, that we can never understand the "mysterious ways" of the world.

Why is the controversy of materialism versus idealism of importance? Because it is not just a question of speculation and abstract thought; it is, in the last analysis, a question of practical action. Man does not only observe external Nature: he changes it, and himself with it.

Secondly, the materialist standpoint also means that what is in men's minds, what mind is conscious of, is external reality; ideas are reflections, as it were, of reality, they have their origin in external reality. Of course this does not mean that all ideas are **true**, are correct reflections of reality; the point is that actual experience of reality gives the test of correctness.

The idealist, on the other hand, believes in eternally valid principles, and does not feel concerned in making them fit reality. An example of this in current affairs is the standpoint of absolute pacifism. The completely logical pacifist ignores the real world round him; it is a matter of no importance to him that in reality, in the actual experience of life at the present day, force is a fact that cannot be conjured away by wishing; that in reality, in our actual experience, non-resistance to force brings more force, more aggression and brutality. The fundamental basis of such absolute pacifism is an idealist view of the world, a disbelief in external reality, even if the pacifist concerned is not conscious that he has any such philosophical outlook.

Marxism, therefore, bases all its theories on the materialist conception of the world, and from this standpoint it examines the world, it tries to discover the laws which govern the world and – since man is a part of reality – the laws which govern the movement of human society. And it tests all its discoveries, all its conclusions, by actual experience, rejecting or modifying conclusions and theories which, to use the simplest phrase, do not fit the facts.

This approach to the world (always including human society) reveals certain general features, which are real, and not imposed by the mind; the Marxist view is essentially scientific, drawn from reality and is not a “system” invented by some clever thinker. Because of this it not only sees the world as materialist, but finds that it also has certain characteristics which are covered by the term “dialectical.” The phrase “dialectical materialism,” which expresses the Marxist conception of the world, is generally regarded as mysterious. But it is not really mysterious, because it is a reflection of the real world, and it is possible to explain the word “dialectical” by describing ordinary things which everyone will recognise.

In the first place, nature or the world, including human society, is not made up of totally distinct and independent things. Every scientist knows this, and has the very greatest difficulty in making allowances for even the important factors which may affect the particular thing he is studying. Water is water; but if its temperature is increased to a certain point (which varies with the atmospheric pressure) it becomes steam; if its temperature is lowered, it forms ice; all kinds of other factors affect it. Every ordinary person also realises, if he examines things at all, that nothing, so to speak, leads an

entirely independent existence; that everything is dependent on other things.

In fact, this interdependence of things may seem so obvious that there may not appear to be any reason for calling attention to it. But, in fact, people do not always recognise the interdependence of things. They do not recognise that what is true in one set of circumstances may not be true in another; they are constantly applying ideas formed in one set of circumstances to a quite different set of circumstances. The attitude to freedom of speech is a case in point. In general, freedom of speech helps democracy, helps the will of the people to express itself on the course of events, and is therefore helpful to the development of society. But freedom of speech for fascism, for something that is essentially repressive of democracy, is quite different; it holds back the development of society. And no matter how many times the formula “freedom of speech” is repeated, what is true of it in normal circumstances, for parties whose aim is democracy, is not true of it for fascist parties, whose aim is to discredit democracy and finally to destroy it.

The dialectical approach also sees that nothing in the world is really static, that everything is moving, changing, either rising and developing or declining and dying away. All scientific knowledge confirms this. The earth itself is in constant change. It is even more obvious in the case of living things. Therefore it is essential to any really scientific investigation of reality, that it should see this change, and not approach things as if they were eternally fixed and lasting.

Again, why is it essential to bring out this feature of reality, which is so obvious when it is stated? Because in practice this is not the approach men make to reality, especially to human society, and for that matter to individual men and women. The person who rejects the idea that production for profit is not a permanent feature of human society, that it came into being, developed and is now in its decline – such a person does not apply the conception of reality which has just been described as obvious. And, in fact, the conception that “as it was, so it will be” is to be met with almost everywhere, and is a constant barrier to the development of individuals and of society.

There is a further point arising from the clear realisation that everything is changing, developing or dying away. Because this is so, it is of supreme practical importance to recognise the stage

reached by each thing that concerns us. The farmer is well enough aware of this when he is buying a cow; the buyer of a house has it well in mind; in fact, in the simpler practical things of life no one ignores the general law. But it is unfortunately not so well appreciated in regard to human institutions, especially the system of production and the ideas that go with it. However, this is a point that is developed later on.

The interdependence of things, and the fact that things are always in a process of change, have been referred to as obvious features of reality. The third feature which is included in the “dialectical” approach to reality is not quite so obvious, although it is easy enough to recognise that it is true once it is stated.

This feature is: the development that takes place in things is not simple and smooth, but is, so to speak, broken at certain points in a very sharp way. The simple and smooth development may take place for a very long time, during which the only change is that there is more of a particular quality in the thing. To take the example of water again: while the temperature is being raised the water remains water, with all the general characteristics of water, but the amount of heat in it is increasing. Similarly, while the temperature is being reduced the water remains water, but the amount of heat in it is decreasing.

However, at a certain point in this process of change, at boiling or freezing point, a sudden break occurs; the water completely changes its qualities; it is no longer water, but steam or ice. This feature of reality is particularly evident in chemistry, where less or more of a particular constituent completely changes the character of the result.

In human society, gradual changes take place over a long period without any fundamental changes in the character of society; then a break takes place, there is a revolution, the old form of society is destroyed and a new form comes into existence and begins its own process of development. Thus within feudal society, which was production for local consumption, the buying and selling of surplus products led to the production of things for the market and so on to the beginnings of capitalist production. All of this was a gradual process of development; but at a certain point the rising capitalist class came into conflict with the feudal order, overthrew it, and transformed the whole character of production; capitalist society

took the place of feudalism and began a more tempestuous development.

The fourth feature of dialectics is the conception of what causes the development which, as we have already seen, is universal. The dialectical approach to things shows that they are not simple, not completely of one character. Everything has its positive and its negative side; everything has within it features that are developing, becoming more dominant, and features that are passing away, becoming less dominant. One feature is always expanding, the other resisting that expansion. And it is the conflict between these opposites, the struggle of the rising factor to destroy the domination of the other, and the struggle of the dominant factor to prevent the other factor from developing, which is the content of the whole process of change which ends ultimately in a violent break.

This is most clearly seen in human society. At each historical stage there has been division into classes, one of which was developing and one declining. It was the case in feudal society, with capitalism developing in the germ and, as it developed, coming more and more into conflict with feudalism. It is the same in the capitalist period, with the working class as the rising factor that “has the future in its hands.” Capitalist society is not all of one kind; as capitalists develop, so do workers. The conflict between these classes develops. It is this conflict, this “contradiction” within capitalism, and the actual struggles which arise from the division into classes, which ultimately lead to the sharp break, the revolution.

It is now possible to put together the various ideas covered by the phrase “dialectical materialism.” It is the view which holds that reality exists apart from our consciousness of it; and that this reality is not in isolated fragments, but interdependent; that it is not static but in motion, developing and dying away; that this development is gradual up to a point, when there is a sharp break and something new appears; that the development takes place because of internal conflict, and the sharp break is the victory of the rising factor over the dying factor.

It is this conception of the world, including human society, that sharply distinguishes Marxism from all other approaches to reality. Of course, dialectical materialism is not something standing above reality – an arbitrarily invented outlook into which the world must fit. On the contrary, it claims to be the most accurate representation of the world, and to be drawn from the accumulated knowledge and

experience of man. It is in the mind of the Marxist because it is in the world outside; it is the real “shape of things!”

The discoveries of science are more and more confirming that this is so; scientists who approach nature from the dialectical standpoint find that it reveals new facts, explains things which seemed inexplicable. But in the present stage of human development the whole outlook of dialectical materialism is of the greatest importance in relation to human society.

The examples given earlier in this chapter serve to show the difference in outlook between the Marxist and the non-Marxist in connection with the development of society and the ideas that spring from this development. There are other examples in other chapters. But the question of the nature of reality is of such practical importance in the life and actions of men and women that it is worth closer study.

It was noted above that the materialist outlook means that matter, external reality, is regarded as primary, and mind as secondary, as something that develops on the basis of the matter. It follows from this that man’s physical existence, and therefore the ways in which it is preserved, come before the ideas which man forms of his own life and methods of living. In other words, practice comes before theory. Man got himself a living long before he began to have ideas about it. But also the ideas, when he developed them, were associated with his practice; that is to say, theory and practice ran together. And this was so not only in the early stages, but at all stages. The practical ways in which men get their living are the basis of their ideas. Their political ideas rise from the same root; their political institutions are formed in the practice of preserving the system of production, and not at all on the basis of any abstract principles. The institutions and ideas of each age are a reflection of the practice in that age. They do not have an independent existence and history, developing, so to speak, from idea to idea, but they develop when the material mode of production changes. A new custom takes the place of the old custom, and gives rise to new ideas.

But old ideas and institutions persist, alongside the new. Ideas which developed from the feudal system of production, such as respect for the monarch and the nobility, still play an important part in capitalist Britain. There are ideas developed from the capitalist system of production; some are modifications of old forms, such as respect for the wealthy, irrespective of noble birth. Then there are

the socialist ideas, derived essentially from the fact that production under capitalism becomes more and more social in character, more collective and interdependent. These three sets of ideas are current in present-day society, and no one of them is finally and absolutely true, valid for all eternity.

This, however, does not mean that Marxism regards them all as equally unreal. On the contrary, Marxism sees the feudal ideas as completely past, the capitalist ideas as declining, the socialist ideas as becoming valid. Or rather, at this stage not only becoming. For since November, 1917, it has been possible to test socialist ideas from actual experience: to prove that they fit reality. The main idea, that even the vast and complex modern machinery of production can be organised for use and not for profit, has been confirmed in practice. Experience has shown that this means also an enormous increase in production, the abolition of crises, and a continuous rise in the standard of living of the people. In other words, the socialist ideas, scientifically developed by Marx from the observed facts of economic and social development, remained, so to speak, a scientific hypothesis until 1917; now experience has confirmed them as true.

The conscious action of the Russian Communist Party, whose outlook was Marxist, brought about the overthrow of the old system and the establishment of the new. From that point on, the Russian people – overwhelmingly non-Marxist in their outlook – began to experience the new system, to become socialists **in practice**. On such a basis the conscious educational work of the theoretical socialists bore quick fruit, and the combination or practice and education is rapidly transforming the outlook of the whole people.

It should be made clear that Marxism does not claim more for its view of the world, dialectical materialism, than that this approach helps the investigator in every field of science to see and understand the facts. It tells us nothing about the details, which must be the subject of special study in each field. Marxism does not deny that a considerable body of scientific truth can be built up on the basis of studying the facts in isolation. But it claims that when they are examined in their interdependence, in their development, in their change of quantity into quality, in their internal contradiction, the scientific truth that emerges is infinitely more valuable, more **true**.

And this holds good particularly in the science of society. The study of individual men and women, or even the whole societies at

one time and place, can give conclusions of only very limited value; they cannot be applied to other groups, or even to the same society at another time. What gives the Marxist study of society its special value is that it deals with society not only as it exists here and now (this is of course essential), but as it has existed in the past and as it is developing as the result of its internal contradictions. This gives men and women the first chance of consciously fitting their actions to a process that is actually taking place, a movement that, as Marx said, is “going on before our own eyes” if we care to see it. It gives us a guide to our actions which cannot be provided by any abstract principles or views which in fact represent some static outlook of the past.

CHAPTER VIII

A GUIDE TO ACTION

In one of his early works Marx wrote: “The philosophers have only **interpreted** the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.” To Marx this was the essential point of his whole view of the world – “Marxism” was not an academic science, but knowledge to be used by man in changing the world.

It was not enough to know that capitalism was only a passing phase, and that it must be succeeded by socialism; it was clear also that this would not happen by itself, as a result of purely economic changes. However many crises developed, however much suffering was caused by capitalism, there was no point at which capitalism would turn into socialism as water turns into ice when its temperature falls to 32 degrees Fahrenheit. Humanity does not make the leap from one system of production to another except as the result of human action. And Marxism claims to provide the knowledge and the method which can guide human action to that end.

The broad outlines of the action that will end capitalism and open the way to socialism are already clear: Marx saw this as essentially the action of the working class, using “forcible means” against the force employed by the ruling class to prevent any change in its own economic and political privileges. But this general formula had to be filled in from the actual experience of the working class. From the revolutionary experiences of 1848 and 1871 Marx was able to draw certain conclusions about the character of the struggle and the form of government which the working class would establish after it had taken power. But the problem is far wider than that: it is the question of how the working class prepares for the final struggle.

Marx was continually working on this problem, not in an abstract way, but in the very practical form of taking part in building up the various types of working-class organisation on which he considered that all future action must depend. The famous **Manifesto of the Communist Party** of 1848 was a manifesto of the Communist League, the organisation in which Marx was active for many years; the “International Workingmen’s Association,” now known as the First International, was founded by his efforts in 1864. Marx was continually in touch with the British labour movement of his day, as well as with the various working-class movements in other countries.

But in those days only a tiny fraction of the working class was organised even in trade unions and co-operatives, and in no country was there a working-class political party of any size or influence.

Not only was this the case, but in many European countries the working class itself was hardly formed. Everywhere outside of Britain, capitalist industry was only in its early stages, and the rising capitalist class was still striving to establish itself against the survivals of feudal aristocracy. The setting up of working-class parties and the nature of their work had to be related to the stage of development reached in each country. All through the series of revolutions in 1848 Marx and his socialist colleagues were associated with the struggles against autocracy. Engels fought in the German democratic army against the forces of the King of Prussia.

Yet the **Manifesto of the Communist Party**, stressing the necessity of socialism and of a working-class revolution to win it, was published early in 1848. To those who see in Marxism a series of rigid dogmas, it may appear difficult to reconcile the theory of working-class revolution with participation in a democratic struggle in which the leading part was played by capitalists and various sections of the “**petty bourgeoisie**” or middle classes. The aim of the struggle was not socialism, but some form of parliamentary democracy.

To Marx, however, the issue was quite clear. At that stage in the whole historical process the working class was quite unprepared to carry out its historical mission. It could only help the process forward by clearing the road along which it had to advance. And in order to do this it must ally itself with other sections of the people who were also interested in clearing the road of the feudal autocratic barriers. The next stage would come – more or less rapidly, in accordance with the degree of success against the feudal autocracy, the stage of capitalist development and the development of the working class itself. Therefore the immediate aim of working-class strategy must be to destroy autocracy and open up parliamentary democratic conditions which would help the workers to develop their organisations and their understanding of the final goal.

In the countries like Britain, where parliamentary democracy was already established, the immediate aims of the working class were different, but also of necessity were not the immediate taking of power, simply for the reason that the workers were not yet ready. In Britain there was not even a working-class political party; there

were only small groups of socialists, and the workers in general were still closely associated with the Liberal Party. Therefore the immediate aim was the establishment of a working-class political party which would cut itself off from the Liberals and put forward a socialist programme, at the same time supporting every form of working-class struggle on the industrial, social and political field.

Marx regarded the formation of a working-class political party as the most important first step in the struggle for power against the capitalists. But it was not only a question of having a political organisation: it was equally important that the policy of the Party should be “Marxist” – that is, it must be based on the Marxist view of the world; it must be based on an understanding of the part played in history by class struggle; it must see every struggle as paving the way for the final struggle that would bring socialism.

Marx and Engels played a considerable part in shaping the policies of the political parties that were set up during their life-time. But apart from the short-lived Paris Commune, which itself was not led up to and directed by a single working-class party, the course of events did not make it possible for the workers in any country to pass beyond the early organising stages of their struggle against capitalism. It was not until the beginning of this century that the development of monopolies on a general scale, the emergence of the imperialist stage of capitalism described in Chapter IV, quickened the pace of working-class development and at the same time brought a new stage of imperialist rivalry and of class conflict.

This did not make Marxism “out-of-date.” But the fact that a new stage had been reached in the development of capitalism and of the relations between the capitalists and the workers meant that the strategy and tactics of the class struggle had to be developed further than Marx and Engels were able to do in the period in which they lived. This application of Marxism to the period of imperialism and revolution was carried out by Lenin.

It is not possible to give more than a few of the leading ideas developed by Lenin in this way; those which are perhaps of the widest interest at the present time are: the theory of the allies of the working class; parliamentary democracy; and the question of war.

It has already been shown that Marx had repeatedly stressed the point that the class which overthrows a former ruling class enters into action alongside of other sections of the people. In the case of the capitalist overthrow of the feudal autocracy, the capitalists were

always supported by the peasantry, by the middle classes and by the working class so far as it had developed. What would be the nature of the alliance when the stage came for the overthrow of the capitalist class?

It would be contrary to the whole outlook of Marxism to think that any rigid formula could be found which would apply in any and every country, at any and every time. One of the most fundamental ideas of Marxism is the interdependence of things. The working class, like everything else in the world, is not living in a vacuum; there is a very definite and real world round it, including a particular grouping of other classes and sections of classes which varies from time to time and from country to country.

Take Russia, for example – Tsarist Russia, up to the March revolution of 1917. The numerically small working class was surrounded by a vast ocean of peasants and by other “middle” sections – shopkeepers, small traders, professional **intelligentsia**, etc. All of these wanted freedom from autocratic rule; the peasantry wanted more land. It was possible, therefore, for the “Bolshevik” (majority) section of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, led by Lenin, to form a general alliance with the whole of the peasantry, in spite of the fact that some were relatively rich and others poor. Their combined strength, the movement against Tsardom both in town and country, brought down the Tsar in the March revolution of 1917. A “Provisional Government” of capitalists was formed; at the same time a change took place in the relations between the workers and the peasants. The **main enemy** of the working class, and of the peasantry, had been Tsardom; but now the Tsar was gone. The **main enemy** of the working class, the enemy now barring the advance of the working class, was the Capitalist class represented by the Provisional Government. But not all the peasants regarded the capitalist class as its enemy. On the contrary, the richer peasants, the **kulaks**, who employed labour, traded and speculated, regarded the Provisional Government as its own. Therefore at that stage the working class could not ally itself with all the peasantry, but only with the poorer peasantry and the landless labourers. It was this alliance which carried through the November revolution of 1917 in town and country. But without the first alliance – the alliance with all the peasantry against the Tsar – the first revolution would have been impossible in March, 1917, and the stage of the November revolution would not have matured.

The general formula of an alliance of the working class with other sections against the main enemy, the class that is holding back the advance, always holds good; but in order to apply it in a particular country it is necessary to make an analysis of all the class forces in the country (in certain circumstances, in other countries as well, as in the case of Spain), to be clear on which section is the main enemy in the sense described. Once the main enemy is realised, it is then a question of what other sections, in addition to the working class, are also interested in clearing the road from the main enemy; and when this analysis has been made, it is possible to lay down a line of policy which will bring the widest possible sections of the people into action against the main enemy.

As we have seen, with the emergence of the monopoly stage of capitalism, economic (and therefore political) power has been more and more concentrated in the hands of small and very rich groups in each industrially developed country. This means not only that the conflict between these groups and the working class becomes more acute, but also that important differences develop within the capitalist class itself. It is perfectly true that the capitalist class has always had richer and less rich sections; but in the stage of world-wide monopolies the finance-capital group is divided from the mass of smaller capitalists by a great gulf. The interests of the finance-capital group in extending its monopoly hold, in conquering new territory, and in its dealings with the rival finance-capital groups in other countries (whether by dividing up markets, price-fixing agreements, or hostile tariffs and even war), come into direct conflict with the interests of the smaller capitalists. The smaller capitalists feel themselves threatened with being squeezed out of existence by the monopolies. On one issue after another – sometimes only as individuals, but sometimes also as whole sections – they come to regard the advance of the monopolists as the most immediate danger threatening them.

When the most aggressive section of the finance-capital group turns to fascism, when it openly takes control of the whole political and economic organisation of the country, then the smaller capitalists and the middle classes become more conscious of the fact that the monopolists are their main immediate enemy. The pressure is greater; the political helplessness of the middle sections of the people is more obvious.

The fact that, for example in Germany, the smaller capitalists and the middle classes generally at first sided with the fascists, that is, with the monopoly capitalists, makes no difference to the economic analysis. It simply means, on the one hand, that the fascist propaganda, including the anti-Jewish propaganda, succeeded in concealing the main enemy of the smaller capitalists; and on the other hand, that it succeeded in doing this because the working-class movement was not united and was therefore unable to attack the main enemy in such a clear way that the smaller capitalists and middle classes would have been drawn in as allies.

In fact, however, in spite of repeated waves of anti-Jewish propaganda, it has become increasingly difficult for the German (and Italian) finance-capital groups to maintain the loyalty of the smaller capitalists and middle classes generally; the economic facts break through all pretence. And therefore once again, though at a desperately late stage, the alliance of the working class in the fascist countries with the smaller capitalists and middle classes has become possible and necessary, in order to defeat the main enemy.

The case of China can be taken to illustrate the Marxist analysis in relation to a country which is almost a colony. In 1926 the working-class movement, in alliance with the Kuomintang – the Chinese nationalist landowner and capitalist organisation – advanced north from Canton with the aim of unifying China against the foreign imperialists. In 1927 the Kuomintang, under Chiang Kai-shek's leadership, broke the alliance, made terms with the foreigners, and turned against the working class. For practically ten years Chiang Kai-shek waged war on the workers and peasants in the "Red" areas. During this period the working class and revolutionary peasantry had no alternative but to fight for its existence. But when the Japanese attacked China, the Chinese working class and peasants, led by the Communist Party, which understood the Marxist approach to things, realised that a new situation had arisen. The main enemy was now neither the Chinese landowners and capitalists nor the British, American or French imperialist groups. The main enemy, the enemy who was most urgently threatening the advance of the working class, was the Japanese invader. Against that main enemy all sections of the Chinese people could be united. And that policy was applied, with very unexpected results for the Japanese. A non-Marxist approach to the situation would have maintained the hostility to Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang simply because

they did not and could not represent working-class interests in general. But they could, and did, represent the particular working-class interest, which was also their own, of freeing China from the Japanese invader. This brings out the point that there cannot be any alliance except on issues on which the interests of the working class coincide with the interests of other sections. It is not a question of either the workers or their allies abandoning their special interests, or deceiving their partners in the alliance as to their real aims. That is the characteristic fascist approach. The essence of the class alliance is that for the time being, in the special circumstances, the interests of the allies are identical. It was this that brought the Spanish workers, peasants, middle classes and small capitalists and Nationalist sections into alliance against the big landowners and bankers and foreign invaders.

There is often considerable confusion about the “middle classes.” The term is popularly used as implying some vague kind of social status. But Marxism sees the middle class as an economic group – a class that does not get its living from employing workers to produce surplus value for it, or from producing surplus value for employers. It consists neither of capitalists nor of workers. It consists of independent people working for their own living. The typical peasant, working his holding for himself, belongs to this “middle” group. So does the working farmer in Britain. It does not make any difference whether in fact he employs one or two men, the point is that he works, and must work, because he cannot live on the labour of the few men he is able to employ. Exactly the same is true of the small shopkeeper or the very small employer of industrial labour in the towns. They are neither capitalists nor proletarians: they are in a “middle” group. And it is perfectly clear that although this group shades off into the capitalist class at one end, and into the working class at the other, its interests are quite distinct from the interests of the monopoly capitalists.

It is the same with the professional middle class – the doctors, architects, scientists, musicians, writers and so on. They are in any case not capitalists; in the main they are independent workers. Their interests, too, are quite distinct from those of the monopoly capitalists.

To a considerable extent, these middle sections have economic interests which are identical with those of the working class. The small shopkeeper in the distressed areas very soon realises this. The

professional worker does not prosper, but loses work, when social services are cut down. In the stage when monopoly capitalism is striving to spread fascism and war, the intellectual and political outlook of these middle sections receives heavy shocks, and it becomes much easier for them to understand that their interests are much closer to those of the workers than to those of the monopoly capitalists.

It is this real identity of interests which is the basis of the People's Front, and which is made more and more obvious in the course of the struggle against the main enemy.

It is obvious that the transformation of these middle sections into conscious supporters of socialist society can only become general when the economic system is changed, when the allies of the working class begin to get their living a different way. But it is equally obvious that in the course of the allied struggle against the main enemy, an increasing number of the allies of the working class will become aware of the whole course of things – in short, will become Marxists. And this is of importance for the transformation of the sections to which they belong.

The Marxist approach to parliamentary democracy and working-class dictatorship is also based, not on abstract “principles” of government, but on the stage reached in the development of the class struggle.

Reference has already been made to the stress laid by Marx on the necessity for the working class to fight for parliamentary democracy as against autocracy, and for the constant widening of democratic rights. But parliamentary democracy, like all other institutions, is not eternal; historically, in practically all countries it grew up to meet the needs of the rising capitalist class against feudal autocracies. In certain stages, it also helps the working class forward; but not in all stages. The Russian Marxists, for example, were in general associated with the demand for a Duma (the Russian parliament). But when at last, in the autumn of 1905, the Tsar announced that the first Duma would be called, they organised a boycott of it. Why? Because at that time the revolutionary tide was rising high. Acceptance of the Duma, the organisation of an election campaign and the fastening of attention on the parliamentary struggle would have damped down the mass struggle in the country, and made it easier for the Tsar to crush the revolutionary movement.

Parliament in such circumstances meant holding back the advance of the working class, not helping it on.

On the other hand, when the revolutionary movement had been defeated, and the machinery of elections and parliament meant legal opportunities for working-class propaganda to steady the movement and begin to lead it forward again, the Russian Marxists participated in the later Dumas – and used them with great effect to prepare the workers for the next advance.

Then, again, in March, 1917, when the Tsar abdicated, and the Provisional Government was formed from the capitalist representatives in the Duma, the Russian Marxists did not support it, but demanded, “All power to the Soviets.” At that stage once again the parliamentary machinery could only hold back the further advance, which had to be made with the workers’ own organisation. And when after the November revolution of 1917 the Soviets really won all power, it was through them that the working class exercised its democracy for the common people and its dictatorship over the landlords and big capitalists and their supporters.

The same approach is made by Marxists at each stage: does parliament, at this moment in this particular country, help the working class forward (which means, help mankind forward) or does it serve only to hold back the advance? In Germany after the abdication of the Kaiser in 1918, for example, that question was necessarily raised. And the Marxists gave the answer: at this point in history, when the working class is in movement, when the former ruling class is in retreat, only Soviets can carry the struggle forward; the restoration of the Reichstag will mean the restoration of capitalist rule and the defeat of the working class. Unfortunately, the working class was mainly influenced not by Marxists, but by the Social Democrats, who had supported the Kaiser’s Government in the War. They put forward parliamentary democracy as a principle which was so to speak sacred, a principle to be applied at all times and in all circumstances. They succeeded in applying it; and the subsequent history of Germany is the penalty which the working class – not only in Germany – has had to pay for the false notions of the German working-class leaders.

All through the period after the War, when the ruling class in every country had been weakened and the working-class movement was growing stronger in organisation and activity, the Marxists stressed the reactionary part played by parliaments, their use by the

ruling class to delay social advance and to sanction repressive measures against the workers. This was not because Marxists were against democracy, but because they were for a fuller democracy – they wanted to “win the battle of democracy” by overthrowing capitalist rule and setting up soviets, working-class rule; they pointed out that in practice parliamentary democracy at that stage meant reactionary capitalist dictatorship.

But with the advance of fascism – when the finance-capital groups began to turn to an open dictatorship – the defence of parliamentary democracy meant keeping the road open for the working class: protecting its organisations and the rights it had won. And therefore Marxists supported parliamentary democracy, and will always support it as against fascism; though a time may come when once again parliamentary democracy will be a brake on the advance of the working class, which will turn to soviets as the democratic form through which it can win socialism.

The Marxist approach to the question of war bears the same character: there can be no abstract general principle, applicable to all wars at all times. The only approach is: does this war help on or hold back the advance of the working class? Put in terms of war itself: does this war mean more war, or does it help to end the system that breeds war? It is clear that civil war, the struggle of the working class and its allies to overthrow the present ruling class, helps to end the system that breeds war; it is therefore just and necessary because the ruling class uses force to maintain itself in power. It should be equally clear that wars of liberation of subject peoples also help forward the working-class advance and weaken the ruling class; therefore Marxists also regard them as just and necessary.

In the case of imperialist wars of conquest (such as fascist Italy's conquest of Abyssinia or Albania) the conclusion is equally clear: such wars are unjust, throw back the working-class advance, strengthen the ruling class. To the extent that the working class in the imperialist country is organised and able to act, it can have only one attitude: to bring about defeat, if possible to use the war situation to overthrow the ruling class and take power. Precisely the same attitude applies to imperialist wars of conquest between two rival imperialist powers; the working class only helps to fasten new shackles on itself if it supports its ruling class in such wars. Its aim

in both countries must be to bring about defeat, and if possible to use the war situation to overthrow the ruling class and take power.

On the other hand, not every war in which an imperialist country is involved is necessarily a war of conquest. At the present historical stage particularly, when the immediate menace of wars of conquest comes from the fascist States, it cannot be a matter of indifference to the working class whether a democratic country is conquered by fascism or not. If, for example, Chamberlain had not succeeded in handing over Czechoslovakia to Germany; if Czechoslovakia had resisted; if France had stood by her pledge to help; and if, in spite of this, Germany had attacked Czechoslovakia (which, of course, would not have happened) the war would not have been an unjust war on the part of Czechoslovakia, France and the Soviet Union. The working class of Czechoslovakia and France would not have aimed at the defeat of their own country, but at the defeat of the fascist aggressor, for the defeat of Hitler in such a war would have meant the release of the German working class and an immense impetus to the working-class advance in every country.

Naturally – and this would be the case in any capitalist democratic country involved in war against fascist aggression – the working class would not have passively accepted the policy and methods of the French ruling class. It would have done its utmost to ensure the conduct of the war by a Government that really represented the people, that was really determined to defeat fascism. Therefore, side by side with support of the war, the working class would have resisted all efforts by its own ruling class to take advantage of the war to improve its position or to come to terms with the fascist enemy in order to save it from defeat. But the working class would, above all, strive to win the war, to defeat fascism, because victory would bring to an end the whole period of fascist repression and open the way for a rapid advance in every country.

Thus we see that on the question of allies, on the question of parliamentary democracy, and on the question of war – Marxism insists on an analysis of the actual situation and the relation of class forces as the necessary approach. No dogmas that apply everywhere, but a careful analysis and a policy determined by the one general principle: does this help or hinder the working-class advance at this particular stage, in these particular circumstances?

This approach, after all, is only the necessary scientific approach to all the facts of nature. Only those who do not accept man

as a part of nature, who believe that he is in some sense independent of nature, subject to eternal moral principles that in some way are more valid than the facts of life, can find the Marxist approach to problems of action difficult to understand.

The laws of external nature do not operate in the abstract, regardless of all surrounding facts. Temperature, pressure, the influence of other objects, determine the actual operation of these laws. In the case of human society, with its enormous complexity and mass of mental as well as physical relationships, it would be totally unscientific to expect rigid universal laws, which would apply in all circumstances.

It is precisely this unscientific approach, the approach from the standpoint of universal dogmas, that brings disaster wherever it is applied in human society. Marxism frees men from dogmas which they had thought eternally valid but which are in fact only a reflection of the class interests of one time and place. And in freeing them from these dogmas, it points the way forward for human society as a whole, and provides the guiding lines for their own action.

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