

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF MARXISM

I

WHICH is the true heir of Karl Marx, Communism, Social Democracy, Bolshevism, or Menshevism? This is a much vexed question. The answer to it depends on the angle from which Marxism is viewed. If we stress the sociological determinism of Marx, then the Social Democrats must be recognized as more consistent Marxists than the Communists; but if we stress fidelity to the revolutionary spirit, then the Communists show more sign of it than do the Social Democrats who have lost it. The Communists alone, imbued with the messianic idea of the proletariat, are really consumed with a crusading ardour for the destruction of the old world and the building up of a new. And it is because Communism, as distinct from Social Democracy, thus assumes a religious character that it is hostile to and persecutes all other forms of belief.

But what are we to think of sociological determinism, which gives Marxism the character of a scientific socialism and distinguishes it from utopian socialism?

Marxism is now undergoing metamorphoses which are possible only because the old classical Marxism involved two radically opposed principles—one materialist and the other idealist—and so could transform itself into a system contrary to its economic determinism. Economic and historical materialism was never a complete account of Marxism, nor expressed its essential character. Generally Marxism has been regarded as the ultimate and extreme form of determinism—both followers and adversaries were agreed on this. Despite the fact that a materialist, Epicurus, was the only indeterminist of ancient philosophy, it has **been** commonly thought that a philosophy of materialism must inevitably be determinist. Moreover, the strongest impression left on the mind by Marxism was its insistence on the part played by economics in determining not only the entire development and structure of human society,

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but also the intellectual and spiritual life of man. No place was left for liberty and spontaneity. Nevertheless, from the beginning a difficulty was apparent. how could a process determined solely by economics automatically bring about a perfect communist regime, in which reason and justice would be triumphant, the irrational principle conquered, and all life rationally organized? The material economic process, admittedly irrational, could hardly furnish a guarantee of this.

However, it must not be forgotten that the thought of Marx was greatly influenced by the panlogism of Hegel. Marx considered that the Logos was inherent in the material process and that it would conquer. He reversed the philosophy of Hegel and transposed, so to speak, the ideal principle by inserting it in matter. This ideal principle, logical and rational, is active in his materialism as it is in the idealism of Hegel, and its results are just as rational. Thus Marx shared the views of Hegel on liberty as resulting from necessity, as a necessity consciously recognized. His thought, however, like that of others, varied according as it looked towards the past or the future. Determinism of its nature looks backwards rather than forwards; its transposition into the future can only be due to a confusion of two distinct planes. Marx always maintained that socialism was determined by the necessary economic process of the part and that it could not be the result of liberty and free creation. But in the socialistic future, the determination existing in the part through economics would exist no longer. That is why Marx and Engels speak of the 'jump' that must be made in order to pass from the region of necessity to that of liberty. The principle of necessity is not of universal application to all time: it bears only on the past, and especially on the past under the capitalist system. Though everything be determined by necessity in the bourgeois-capitalist world, it will not be so in the socialist world, because social reason will then have attained to the mastery of elementary and irrational forces, and social man will be the master of his own life and the life of the world.

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Sociological determinism can therefore be given an interpretation different from that which it has had up to the present. and this is what the philosophy of Soviet Communism attempts to do. The sociological determinism of Marx was a reflex of the capitalist world, in which everything was conditioned by economics. Marx lived in the midst of this world, he never knew the era of proletarian revolution. and he could not be acquainted with the new liberty found there. Russian Communism considers itself to be this revolutionary era, and for this reason it can develop a doctrine of liberty and of necessity different from that of classical Marxism. Hence Soviet philosophy is able to surmount determinism and affirm a particular kind of indeterminism. Leninism is no longer authentic Marxism. although it still considers itself to be such. In reality it is a Marxism bent on moulding the future rather than on explaining the past. The Social Democrats on the other hand, more consistent than the Communists with regard to the determination of social development by economics, consider that revolution and the proletarian dictatorship cannot be produced in every country because this requires the existence of a powerful proletariat, created by a developed industrial system. But they have not fully assimilated the thought of Marx where he is concerned with the future, and with the messianic mission of the proletariat, which cannot be deduced from economic revolution. These Social Democrats, who pride themselves on being the orthodox successors of Marx, are considerably upset by the fact that in Soviet Russia it is not economics that determine politics, but politics that determine economics. Faithful to Marxist determinism they cannot conceive how a revolution and a proletarian dictatorship is possible in an industrially backward country, with a rural and peasant economy and an extremely restricted working class. Marx certainly did not foresee such a contingency. In the Russian Revolution the dominating forces were not the realities whose presence seemed to Marx indispensable for the proletarian revolution, but the ideas of Marx concerning the revolution. Thus it was not economics and

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productive material forces that determined the mind, it war the mind, that is the Marxist mind, which determined the material conditions. The power of the central committee of the Communist Party can shape as it likes the economics of a great country. The Marxist ideology is supreme, it has become an obligatory catechism, but it hears no relation to the actual facts. Industrial development has not preceded Communism as an indispensable premise; on the contrary it has been created by Communism, as the Five Years Plan witnesses. The development of production which, according to Marx, should have come about under Capitalism, is in fact being promoted under the auspices of Communism, which, in flat contradiction of the determinist and evolutionary dements of Marxism, is building up a new world on virgin soil.

Russian Communism can do this because it feels itself to be free from restraint, in the unhampered enjoyment of the proletarian revolution, no longer burdened by the capitalist world to which the thought of Marx was still subject. For the Communists the world has become plastic, to be moulded like wax to their will; every Soviet youth feels that he can remake the world. This new spirit has wholly freed itself from the weight of sociological determinism: Communist power reckes no more of economics.

In Soviet Russia there is indeed a positive obsession for economics, which dominates ordinary life, but it has quite another significance. It is a constructive force dependent on the party, the whole body of the people, a rationalization of everything, a levelling of society conditioned by social reason, where all irrationality in social life is at an end. According to the terminology actually adopted by Soviet philosophy, it is not the forces of production which rule, but the producer-reactions, that is to say the revolutionary class war. In other words, it is no longer economics but class action which plays the decisive part. A well organized revolutionary class inspired with the proletarian idea, can do anything, can turn the world upside down, can establish a dictatorship, even though it be

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numerically restricted and the country be industrially backward. The working class is a qualitative, not a quantitative, category. The revolutionary minority can dominate a country or even the entire world if it has really caught the spirit of the kingdom of the free

The Soviet Communist conception of the world avoids materialism only because it has adopted the principle of quality as against that of quantity. Everything is decided by the quality, the truth, the orthodoxy of the proletarian consciousness. A small minority can represent this consciousness; and the fact that it professes the truth gives it the right to rule. Here the quantitative mass of the workers is not essential. A mystical activity is ascribed to the conscious minority of the revolutionary class while the dynamic power of the idea of the proletariat and the myth of its messianic vocation assume fantastic proportions. It is not matter that is active, but man: not as an individual, but as a social being. This conception implies a radical change in the Marxist vision of the universe, it presumes a crisis of materialism and an attempt to create a new philosophy

II

Only the actual philosophy of Leninist Marxism, which corresponds to proletarian revolution and is yet nothing more than a new indeterminism, can explain the fact of a proletarian revolution and dictatorship in a social environment in which according to the old Marxist determinism they could not possibly be. The Russian Revolution has not been made 'according to Marx,' though indisputably 'in his name.' It was effected rather 'according to Dostoievskv' than to Marx, if the latter's name implies that economic evolution determiner socialism

Economic materialism is the profession of Faith of Russian Communists, but it does not explain the Communist Revolution as it actually came about. Moreover, Leninists prefer to use the term dialectic *materialism* instead of economic *materialism*. This is not merely a matter of

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terminology. In fact, according to the view of the world which has now been formed in the atmosphere of proletarian revolution, social development is not determined by economics but by a dialectic; and to 'dialectic' is given a sense opposed to that of mechanist materialism. According to the latter, progress is provoked by a shock from without and influenced by environment. 'Dialectic' is different, it is revolution arising out of matter itself, and in the latest philosophy of Marxism it is styled *autodynamism*.

Mechanist materialism is not compatible with an active and revolutionary philosophy. This is what the young Soviet philosophers have now grasped. Mechanist materialism, which accounts for everything by an impulse from outside and the influence of environment, is clearly incompatible with revolutionary enthusiasm and its belief in the possibility of transforming the world. It is true that the term *materialism* remains an obligatory symbol and to be called by any other name but *materialist* is forbidden, but in reality materialism is disappearing, the mechanist explanation of world-movements is rejected, in other words, determinism has been laid aside.

For ourselves we are more radical and thorough-going than the Soviet philosophers; we would say that materialism is a conservative and inactive conception of the world, engendered by passive submission to external environment, and leaving no room for action and creative reaction. Even calling it a 'dialectic' will not save materialism, for as such it is meaningless, a compromise into which a dialectic cannot fit. Already Marx and Engels had added to the dialectic which they borrowed from Hegel a powerfully dynamic, actual, and revolutionary character. The new dialectic materialists recognize in matter an active and dynamic principle unknown to the old mechanists. This amounts to attributing to matter an active and spiritual principle which is not determined from without. This is really what the Leninists hold. Their dialectic supposes the presence within matter of contradictions which produce movement and dynamic development. This is

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almost to allow matter an inner freedom, a **movement** undetermined by external environment. The result is a far more indeterminist dialectic than Hegel would **have** allowed.

According to Hegel, the dialectic process is subordinated **to** ideal logical necessity, for not only is there a materialist determinism, but there is also an idealist determinism, and it is this last that Hegel taught. Since he held that liberty was the result of dialectic necessity, he could not allow the world any spontaneity, for to have done so would have contradicted his panlogism. To him only the rational was real.

But the Leninist philosophy of the proletarian revolution period recognizes the spontaneity, the *auto-dynamism* of the revolutionary minority. The titanic will of this minority, powerfully organized and inspired by one faith and one idea, spontaneously and of itself can work social miracles. Here indeed *scientific socialism* which is committed to determinist social evolution, is abandoned in favour of *utopian socialism*, which is no longer visionary, but has become energetic and revolutionary. Utopia can be brought into being by the effort of a vast will. The academic objections of Menshevists and Social Democrats carry no weight in face of this revolutionary auto-dynamism. The old Marxist determinism is thus defeated by deeds, by real achievements more forcible than mere intellectual argument. Indeterminism cannot ignore the resistance of matter nor be unconscious of the realities against which action must be taken. But the Soviet mind understands these stresses between the activity of social man and the resistance of matter rather in the spirit of the earlier philosophy of Fichte than in the spirit of materialist philosophy.

What link then remains with Marx? Does his philosophy offer any basis for so vast a social indeterminism? I am inclined to think it does. There is a dualism in Marx, an opposition of contradictory principles. And the Communists are faithful we may say, not to his science, but to his religion.

III

Though Marxism is an integral, monist, monolithic system, from which, according to orthodox Marxists, it is impossible to remove a single stone, yet actually it contains elements diverse in nature, origin and meaning. On one hand there is the scientific element, namely its scientific view of social evolution looked at from the angle of extreme determinism and also of socialism seen solely as the necessary result of economic development. On the other hand, there are its messianic elements, with myths and axioms of its own, and its interpretation of social phenomena by a standard of absolute values, and in relation to its messianic hope in the proletariat which will (according to its ideas) eventually liberate humanity and create a new world, where justice, strong and perfect, will reign and where the old darkness will be dissipated for ever.

I have often drawn attention to the Judaic-religious sources of the belief in the messiahship of the proletariat and in the secularist millenium of Marx. The philosophy from which scientific determinism derives, is not adapted to such a faith and hope. Hence Marx was driven to create the myth of the proletariat, a myth which is active and dynamic to the highest degree and operates even where this proletariat does not actually exist, and where there can be no question of economic determinism.

In the determinist monism on which classical Marxism prided itself, there is, in fact, a break in continuity. It is found in the axiomatic and mythical elements of Marxism, in the universal category of exploitation regarded as the original sin and the source of all past evils, and in the universal myth of the proletariat as the class messiah, called to save humanity. It is found in the faith in a glorious future, the ultimate triumph of the logos and of reason following on the darkness and irrationality of the social economic process which has so far produced nothing but wickedness and injustice. It is found in the hope that one day there will be a terrible judgment on the old evil world.

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It must be admitted that so far a completely logical system of determinist monism has been held by no one, **less** indeed, by Marxists than by other materialists, and least of all by Leninists, because such a system is opposed to the very nature of the human spirit. The implicit religious feeling involved in judgment of the past and faith in the future, in a world to be created by the revolutionary activity of man, can never concur with pure determinist monism, which lays stress on the secondary problems of the relations of spirit and matter, of the psychic and the physical, or, as the Marxists express it, of consciousness and being.

But going deeper still, we find in revolutionary Marxism an extreme, almost Manichean dualism, dividing the world into two kingdoms; the kingdom of Ormuz, of light and reason, and the kingdom of Ahriman, of darkness and unreason. These distinctions were present to Marx himself. The bourgeois capitalist world, indeed the exploiting world **of** the past, is that of Ahriman, the world of matter, where man is the slave of an all-determining economic. The new proletarian and communist world is that of Ormuz, the world of victorious liberty and reason, where economics no longer determines life and man is no longer enslaved. These are the elements of Marxism which the Communists have inherited and are developing into an ever increasing indeterminism. **The** Mensheviks and Social Democrats on **the** other hand concentrate on the determinist elements of Marxism, on which they base the greater possibility **of** moderation and evolution.

When the young Soviet philosophers insist that it is not productive forces but producer-reactions which count, they are not abandoning Marx, as they are reproached with doing by the pedants of Marxism. Productive forces imply that material economic processes are determined of themselves. Producer-reactions signify an active class war, men freely engaged in combat, urged by revolutionary enthusiasm and energy, in a word, auto-dynamism. Now Marx **re-**jected the formulæ of the economists in order to invent his own. Over and above economic laws, above a determined

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world: he set the struggle of human beings, the class war and class action. I am inclined to think that here lies his greatest merit, for it is thus possible to develop his thought in the direction of indeterminism and admit human free-will. It is true that his views may lead to disastrous consequences, but they may also help towards a just appreciation of human activity in society.

IV

Marxism may develop in two ways: either as a doctrine of social reform based on sociological determinism, or towards a social upheaval inspired by a mythical creativeness and ending in free will.

Social Democrats, who follow the first interpretation of Marxism, are tolerant towards religion, which they regard as a private affair, and they are not inclined to religious persecution. The psychological reason for this is clear. They do not consider Marxism to be a religion, but a philosophy that is true only in economics, politics and social life. Each individual is thus free to have what personal religious beliefs he likes or none at all. The weakness of this Social Democracy lies in its drab and grubby commonplaceness; it is incapable of arousing the enthusiasm of youth.

But the Communists, who follow the second interpretation of Marxism, are fanatically intolerant of religion. Far from admitting it to be a private affair, they regard it as public and social: inevitably therefore they persecute it. They act on Marx's aphorism; 'Religion is the dope of the people.' Here again the psychological reason is clear, for they consider Marxism to be not a partial truth affecting only the restricted field of social life, but a complete truth adapted to the whole of life, in other words a religion. Hence the right to personal religious beliefs is denied to the citizen: he is bound to profess the faith of Society. Communism in its complete religious and mythical form leads to the deification of Society and to the negation of the value of human personality and its freedom of thought and conscience. Moreover they do not understand

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Socialism merely as the socialization of economics, with which we might agree, but as the socialization of the human spirit even to its depths, which is anti-Christ.

The philosophy of Hegel is anti-personalist, teaching the absolute domination of the general over the individual and particular, of the State over the person. Marx inherited this anti-personalism and intensified it, despite other elements latent in his thought, notably his perception of human beings over and above economics. But Communism carries this anti-personalism to its extreme: the Communism of the transition period, the creation of Lenin, makes the State absolute; while that which now actually prevails makes society absolute, a shift from the dictator to the mass. It is a return to the old pagan conception of the relation between man and the State, wherein the emancipation of the human spirit from the yoke of Caesar, the triumphant achievement of Christianity, is done away with.

Under new and changing disguises Caesar still seeks to tyrannize over the human spirit and conscience, claiming divine honour. Man must still wage war against Leviathan, the Kingdom of the Beast, who rises up under all forms of imperialism, Roman, Byzantine or Russian. It takes on a new shape in capitalism, which is associated with individualism, though actually under it there is even less freedom for the individual. Its latest forms are those of Communism and Fascism, which also repudiates human personality and violates man's spiritual life without always allowing him the element of social justice afforded by Communism.

To defend man, his human dignity, his economic and spiritual rights, is the watchword of Christendom to-day. A new society and a new order, more just and more humane, can only be born by the admission of supreme value to human personality. In the name of each and every human personality made in the image of God and capable of eternal life, the new order of society, the new and true commune of men must be organized. To this end we must discrown all systems of social monism, which, because they are imperialist, must lead to tyranny.

Christianity is essentially a personal system. And we cannot believe that an individualistic capitalism is any more favourable to personality than is communism, whose anti-personalism, we might almost say, is borrowed from it.

The constructive work our own time demands from us is the building up of a social system which shall correspond to the eternal Christian truth of personality. Such a system no more exists in capitalism than in Communism or Fascism. It might be described as a *personal socialism*. It will allow to man creative liberty, but will effect its purpose nobly, without the vast yet narrow tyranny of Lenin.

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THE POLITICS OF INDUSTRIALISM

MACHINERY runs according to the laws of mechanics and not according to the moral law. This is not to say that the laws of mechanics are immoral, but simply that they are non-moral. Now the main principle of mechanical invention is the elimination of waste energy. Of two machines doing the same work, that is the better which costs less to run. This is the same as saying that the better machine is better designed for its purpose; for the purpose of machinery is to reduce the costs of production. The chief cost of production is human labour. Even the cost of materials is chiefly made up of the cost of human labour. Stone would be as cheap as dirt if it could be dug as easily. Petrol would be as cheap as water if it came down as rain. It is always labour which costs money. I leave out of consideration here the question of bank interest and interest on money borrowed. If interest is not in some way payment for effort it is usury, and as such an unjust charge, something for nothing, a thing to be abolished as a thing