

Notes of the Month

MARXISM—150 YEARS OF VINDICATION

'Everywhere the bourgeoisie considers the spectre laid for good.'

MARX, letter to Sorge, September 27, 1873.

April 16, 1968

Of course it is not one hundred and fifty years from the birth of Marxism. It is one hundred and twenty years from the first classic formulation of fully-developed Marxism in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. But the one hundred and fifty years from the birth of Marx on May 5, 1818, which we commemorate this month, constitutes a historical epoch worthy of examination in the light of Marxism, the epoch of the development of the modern world from the end of the Napoleonic wars to the present day, the epoch which Marxism first illuminated in theory and has since increasingly shaped in practice.

Test of Practice

A century and a half is adequate time for a theory to be judged by practice. A century and a half after the English Revolution, which was the forerunner of modern revolutions, England had become the leader and organiser of counter-revolution against the French Revolution. A century and a half after the American Revolution, which had sounded the tocsin of democratic hope to the oppressed of Europe, the United States had become the citadel of the multi-millionaires sliding into the world economic depression. A century and a half after the French Revolution, which had kindled the inspiration of the battle for liberty, equality and fraternity of all mankind, France had become the paid satellite of American imperialism to fasten the chains of Nato on itself and half of Europe.

Judgment of History

But a century and a half after the birth of Marx, the ideas of genius which found expression in the teachings of Marx and Engels, carried forward by Lenin in the modern era, illuminating the path of history and charting the course forward from class society to classless society, have demonstrated and continue to demonstrate their truth and their power in practice on an ever extending scale throughout the world, equally in the analysis of capitalism and its outcome, the development of the working-class movement, the

extending victories of working-class power on the basis of Marxism, the building of socialism, the present apoplexy of imperialist development and the process of advance of the world socialist revolution. The international Communist movement grown from the handful of the old Communist League to fifty millions today. Socialism has won and been established across one-third of the world; and socialism has only won through in those countries where parties based on Marxism-Leninism have led the working people.

Refuters Refuted

The whole course of this historic advance has been littered with pedantic 'refutations' and 'disproofs' of Marxism, each enjoying its mayfly day of sunshine publicity and now lost in the dustbin. Countless knight crusaders and gladiators of counter-revolution, from Cavaignac to Thiers, from Bismarck to Kolchak, from Hitler to Dulles, have declared the communist spectre banished for ever, only to end themselves in defeat. At every sharp turn and painful moment in the arduous ascending road of the revolution there has never been lacking a host of profound observers and loud-voiced wisecracks to proclaim the 'fatal crisis' and 'disintegration' of world communism. It was 'finished' after the crushing of the Commune. It was 'finished' after the collapse of the International in 1914. It was 'finished' after Nep. It was 'finished' after the Twentieth Congress. Today, it is 'finished' again with the present phase of the Chinese Revolution or the growing pains of the new socialist régimes in Eastern Europe. From every such sharp turning point and testing time Marxism has emerged with renewed vitality and ever greater strength in the real historical world. As Klara Zetkin proclaimed in the days before 1917, when the enemy was still wrapped in complacent self-satisfaction over the crushing of the Commune and the defeat of 1905, the indomitable Klara Zetkin with her blazing revolutionary confidence invoked the inextinguishable spirit of the revolution giving the answer to these enemies: 'I Was! I Am! I Shall Be!' The record of half a century has proved the justice of her confidence. *Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*. World History is the World Court of Judgment.*

* It is characteristic that even present-day West Germany, simultaneously with banning the Communist Party, has the cool effrontery to issue this year a special 30-pfennig stamp bearing the familiar bearded visage of Karl Marx in commemoration of his birth at Trier 150 years ago. Once again the truth is demonstrated of Lenin's words: 'During the lifetime of great revolutionaries the oppressing classes have invariably meted out to them relentless persecution . . . After their death attempts are usually made to turn them into harmless saints.'

Marx and the Era of Revolution

When Marx was born in 1818, Napoleon was still alive, captive in St. Helena, prisoner of the British oligarchy which still feared him as the embodiment of the heritage of the French Revolution, despite all his militarist and empire-building distortions of that heritage, and for his role in shattering the foundations of the old feudal-reactionary order in Europe. The victorious powers of reaction dreamed of chaining up for ever the dreaded spectre of revolution. Castlereagh, Metternich and the Tsar presided over the subjection of Europe in bondage. The vain dreams of the Holy Alliance anticipated the cold war of Truman and Dulles. Equally to no avail. Within one year of the birth of Marx, Peterloo had foreshadowed the future, and within four years Castlereagh had cut his throat. Within seven years the Dekabrist revolt had foreshadowed the future in Russia. Within twelve years the July revolution had overthrown the restored Bourbon monarchy in France, even though in the first stage only to replace it by the limited monarchy of the bankers' nominee. By 1848 the year of revolutions in Europe had dawned.

Hegel's Significance for Revolution

All the new life that was bursting forth in Europe to break through the chilling snows of the rule of the Holy Alliance and its reactionary successors during the boyhood and early youth of Marx, drew its inspiration from the fountain head of the French Revolution, and the preceding prophets of the Enlightenment who had prepared the way. All sought to find the solution to the problems which that revolution had failed to solve. Alike in literature with the Romantic school, represented by Shelley and Byron in England; in philosophy with Fichte and Hegel; and in politics with the heirs of the Jacobins and the beginnings of the working-class movement and Chartism, this new inspiration was breaking through. Hegel, who ended up as a conservative apologist of Prussian autocracy, but who first achieved the highest level and climax of classical pre-Marxist philosophy, drew his initial inspiration from the French Revolution and its conception of Reason remoulding the world. In a famous passage he wrote of the French Revolution:

The idea of Right asserted itself, and the old fabric of injustice broke down. It was a glorious sunrise. All thinking beings celebrated that event. A noble emotion reigned in that epoch; the world was thrilled with spiritual enthusiasm as if the divine had now become a reality in the world.

All human history, Hegel taught, begins with revolt; and he instanced the traditions of every mythology: the revolt of Adam and Eve eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge and punished with divine wrath in the Biblical mythology; or the revolt of Prometheus in the Greek mythology winning fire for mankind, and chained to the rock in eternal torture for punishment, but never submitting. The dialectic of Hegel was the mighty weapon with which he destroyed all the assumptions of metaphysics and dogma, and laid bare the laws equally of thought and of reality as an unending process of contradictory development, ceaselessly annihilating all that might seem permanent and static, and no less ceaselessly creating anew on a higher level, but laws that can be understood and whose understanding becomes the key to freedom. Although the dialectic in Hegel's hands became distorted by idealist mystifications, resulting finally in a monstrous 'system', the essential significance of the dialectic, 'the rational kernel within the mystical shell', as Marx said, was profoundly revolutionary. The philosophy of Hegel, declared Herzen, is 'the algebra of revolution'.

From Idealist Dialectics to Materialist Dialectics

Thus there were two sides of Hegel—the conservative and the revolutionary. Hegel taught: 'The real is the rational; the rational is the real.' The first half declares that all that exists in the world today, with all the horrors of suffering and injustice, can be rationally understood, how and why it has come about. This half in isolation can become the basis of conservatism. But the second half declares that what the human reason is capable of conceiving to replace the existing social order by a new social order can be fulfilled in reality, because the fact that a stage of development has been reached when such a conception can arise means that the conditions have developed for its fulfilment. This is the revolutionary aspect of Hegel's teaching. Thus it is not surprising that there developed two schools of Hegelians: the Right and the Left. It was among the Left Hegelians or Young Hegelians that Marx shaped his thinking, rapidly won recognition in the forefront among their spokesmen, but then proceeded to advance beyond their limitations. They had carried forward the critical method of Hegel to the criticism of religion, the state and all social institutions. But their criticism remained theoretical, to convince opinion of the error of traditional conventional ideas. Feuerbach had sought to displace the idealism of Hegel by materialism, but it was still the

passive materialism of the French eighteenth-century philosophers, by which man is only the product of material conditions, and not himself in turn the creator transforming material conditions. It was Marx who, with his keen sense of the living real world and of the necessity of the unity of theory and practice, in the midst of all this ferment of discussion succeeded to elaborate the solution to the problem to combine the powerful critical method of the dialectic, but freed from subjective idealist mystification, with the firm objective basis of materialism, but freed from the passive mechanical character given it by its previous exponents, and thus reach the foundation and outlook of materialist dialectics—the foundation and outlook of Marxism. Thereby the weapon was forged, not only to interpret the world, but to transform the world. And that transformation has been going forward ever since at an increasing pace, as the working-class movement and the whole movement for human emancipation has been able to build and organise its forces and steer its course more and more consciously on the basis of Marxism.

Two Kinds of Dynamite

In 1867 two events occurred which exemplified the two paths of the world. In that year the first volume of *Capital* was published—the monumental classic which more than any other embodied the harvest of so many long years of research and theoretical work, years that were at the same time crowded with intensive practical activity as in the leadership of the First International. *Capital* not only laid bare for the first time the laws of motion of capitalist society, tracing its character as a historical phase with a beginning and an end, in place of the twaddle about supposed eternal ‘economic laws’ offered by the bourgeois economists. It not only revealed the scientific basis of exploitation in place of the moralising sermons which had previously been the customary diet of socialists, and thereby showed the path of the working class and the class struggle to the future outcome in socialist society. The book also demonstrated by its whole structure and presentation the whole method of materialist dialectics, better than any textbook could do, as well as throwing out fiery sparks all along the route on questions of art, literature and history. In the same year Nobel invented dynamite.

Two Paths—Two Worlds

In this confluence of two events in that same year just over a century ago were symbolised the two paths of two opposing worlds.

Two kinds of dynamite. The dynamite of socialism: the explosive power of the idea, of theory, to illuminate the consciousness of millions all over the world in the ensuing century, and inspire them to end the society of class exploitation and to build the new socialist society. The dynamite of capitalism: the dynamite of nitro-glycerine to rend and burn and destroy the flesh of millions of human beings in the ensuing century. Nobel, who in his will devoted the fortune which he had amassed from his explosives to establish his Prize for Peace, stated his belief when his invention was new that dynamite was so terrible a weapon that it would make war in future impossible. The same blind theory is expressed today about nuclear weapons. Fond illusions. In 1871 the German dynamite shells bombarded Paris. But in that same 1871 the Paris Commune demonstrated the first heroic conquest of political power by the working class, the first fulfilment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as Marx designated it in his immortal *Civil War in France*: the inspiration of the working class in every country for the ensuing generation right on to 1905 and 1917; the signal of the future era. Two paths. Two worlds.

The Course of Revolution

The road of the world revolution in our time from the old society to the new has been neither smooth nor easy. But the whole modern era, now for more than half a century, of the deepening general crisis of capitalism and the extending world socialist revolution has drummed Marxism in practice into the heads of the blindest and the most uncomprehending, until today there is scarcely a speech of a politician, an article in a newspaper or a book on current affairs, which does not contain its observations—usually illiterate—on Marxism. These present-day fashionable ‘interpreters’ and critics of Marxism, having been forced to abandon their previous ostrich rôle of appearing to be unaware of its existence, now monotonously repeat all the second-hand fallacies from which the most elementary acquaintance with what Marx and Lenin really taught would have saved them. Thus, in their estimation of the modern era they assume that communists expected the world revolution to burst like some millenium over the entire world, or at any rate simultaneously in the leading capitalist countries, and so, surveying the record of the half century since 1917, they triumphantly point out that this has not happened. They are as unaware as unborn infants that Marx and Lenin repeatedly emphasised that the world revolution

and the transition to communism would be a complex process extending over many decades.

Inevitability—But No Dates

The commonplace confusion that communist confidence in the inevitability of the world socialist revolution eventually conquering over the entire world, meant that communists in 1917 based their calculations on assumptions of the immediate pending victory of the socialist revolution in other countries, was explicitly 'exploded' by Lenin in his Letter to American Workers in 1918:

We place our stakes on the inevitability of the international revolution; but that does not mean that we are fools enough to place our stakes on the inevitability of the revolution coming on some *definite* and early date. . . . We know that revolutions are not made to order.

And in that same year, in his speech to the Seventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party in March 1918, he described the epoch of 'the collapse of capitalism in its entirety and the birth of socialist society' as

a whole epoch in history, a whole epoch of various kinds of wars, imperialist wars, civil wars inside countries, the intertwining of the two, national wars liberating the nationalities oppressed by the imperialists and by various combinations of imperialist powers that will inevitably enter into various alliances in the epoch of tremendous state-capitalist and military trusts and syndicates, This epoch, the epoch of gigantic cataclysms, of mass decisions forcibly imposed by war, of crises—this epoch has begun and we can see it clearly—is only the beginning.

A description half a century ago not lacking insight into the actual record of this half century.

It Moves

With triumph these same critics of the supposed 'failure' of Marxism in the modern world point out that the socialist revolution—which before 1917 they had dismissed as an impossible dream—took place, not as they imagine Marx to have expected in the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe, but in the weakest imperialist power, Russia. Thereby they only reveal their ignorance that Marx and Engels from the third quarter of the nineteenth century had explicitly repudiated their previous expectation of the beginning of the revolution in Western Europe, and had pointed to Russia as 'the vanguard of revolutionary action in Europe'. With

similar triumph they point out that the extension of the revolution beyond Russia—which they had previously discounted as a dream—has taken place, not as they imagine Lenin to have expected in the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe (that was Trotsky's error), but in backward countries which had previously been colonial areas of imperialism. Thereby they only reveal their ignorance that this is precisely what Lenin had anticipated in his last article in 1923. With triumph they point out that, while they have to admit the socialist revolution has now extended also in Europe beyond Russia, it has 'only' so far transformed the previous relatively weaker capitalist countries in Eastern and Central Europe, and has not yet reached the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe and North America. They forget that Lenin said at the Seventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party in March 1918:

The world socialist revolution cannot begin so easily in the advanced countries as the revolution began in Russia . . . To start without preparation a revolution in a country in which capitalism is developed, in which it has produced a democratic culture and organisation available to everybody, down to the last man—to do so would be wrong, absurd.

Today the cracks have begun to become manifest even in these citadels.

Bankruptcy of Empires

One after another, the empires of capitalism go down. Marx wrote in his Preface to the second edition of *Capital* in 1873 how the crisis of capitalism would 'drum dialectics even into the heads of the mushroom-upstarts of the new, holy Prusso-German empire'. That 'Prusso-German empire' went down in the first world war. Hitler's 'Thousand Year Reich' which succeeded it, after the Western powers had sedulously rebuilt German imperialism, and after it had swept through and subjugated the other nations of continental Europe, went down in twelve years, when faced with the indomitable collective strength and heroism of the socialist Soviet people, in the vanguard of the liberation fight of the peoples of the world. With the customary 'reversal of alliances' traditional in capitalist diplomacy, the fall of Nazism twenty-three years ago should not blind us to the renewed menace now that the blindly repetitive policy of the Western powers has once again performed the Sisyphean task of rebuilding German imperialism and militarism, and neo-Nazism and expansionist aims are again in the open. After the second world war, when liberation was speeding through the world, the

Anglo-American armies took on the rôle of garrisons and policemen of the old order, and socialism was checked in those parts of Europe where the power of these armies and dollar penetration extended. But British and French imperialism bit the dust at Suez; it was not Nasser who went down, as the vainglorious British leaflets dropped over Cairo proclaimed, but Eden. The British Empire has gone down the drain, even though the whole economy of Britain has been placed in pawn by the desperate effort of the lords of the City to maintain and even extend their overseas imperialist exploitation through all the devices of neo-colonialism. Enfeebled Britain has had to be propped up by the United States. And now even the final citadel of the United States has begun to crack.

Clay-Footed Colossus

Only last year Senator Fulbright was publishing his book *The Arrogance of Power* to describe in merciless terms the dreams of omnipotence of the rulers of the United States to act as the world gendarme of counter-revolution. One and a half million American troops have been spread abroad in peacetime to hold down the non-socialist world and threaten the socialist world. The dollar was to displace gold and every other currency and become the world currency. Satellite governments in scores of countries, including the Wilson Labour Government, saw no course but to tremble and obey. Britain was condescendingly included by President Johnson in his New Year address this year among the countries 'dependent on US investment for economic growth and financial stability'. Where now is all this omnipotence? The blows have fallen in quick succession. The dollar trembles, and all the devices of Stockholm will never restore it to its old domination. Against the heroic tiny nation of Vietnam the shameful war of aggression of the American giant, conducted with over half a million troops, more bombs than in the second world war, bestial weapons of destruction against the civilian population, and limitless expenditure to bankrupt even the American budget, is ending in ignominious failure, not only in face of the resistance of the Vietnam people, but of the anger of the whole world and the revolt of all progressive sections of the American people. The big-mouthed braggart General Westmoreland has had to be recalled. The painful path towards negotiations, which can only have meaning for the ending of the aggression and the withdrawal of the invaders, has begun.

Writing on the Wall

And within the citadel of the old order, within the United States, within Washington? The scenes which have followed the murder of Martin Luther King have revealed to the whole world the deep instability and mounting inner conflict which is rending the once idealised American paradise of the model 'new capitalism'. The English historian Arnold Toynbee, no friend of communism, after visiting the United States for the eighteenth time during three months in the latter part of last year, recounted to the London correspondent of *Life* the transformation he had found:

In my opinion there were more changes in the past 24 months than in the preceding period of more than 40 years . . . Two years ago the Americans regarded themselves invulnerable . . . It seemed to them that America could overcome the Vietnam obstacle in a single leap, as incidentally every other obstacle . . . Since then a radical change has taken place . . . In these two years America has been shaken soundly both from the outside and from the inside. The rank-and-file American feels confused, he feels miserable . . . The youth is rising up against the elder generation. The tragic rebellions about which you know were a terrible blow for my American friends—it was harder for them to stomach them than the Vietnam war . . . Such events were unthinkable not only in 1925 but in 1965. At that time America lived in an atmosphere of illusory calmness of soul, in illusory bliss, and now all this has collapsed.

Like a symbol of the new order of the citadel of capitalism, the President, who dispatched half a million troops to sustain his puppets in Vietnam, has himself to be protected by a surrounding array of thousands of troops with bayonets at the ready, by parachutists and machine guns strategically deployed around the White House, with another company of infantry deployed around the Capitol, to hold off the fear of assault by the majority of the population in the capital city of the United States. The internal tension accompanies the external tension, and each exacerbates the other. The cracks in the idol have become manifest to the whole world. This is not yet the end of the road. There is still a long and hard road for the American people to tread in order to win their freedom, which will mean so much for the freedom and peace of all the peoples of the world. But the writing is on the wall.

Challenge of our Time

We have indeed reached an advanced stage in that world transformation which Marx was the first to illuminate and predict, to reach understanding of its laws, and to give guiding lines for the

working people to win through. The nineteenth century spokesmen of capitalism thought they had reached finality; that the social and economic laws of their system were eternal laws; that the smooth wheels of progress would bowl along with the inevitability of evolutionary gradualism until all mankind had reached their own happy condition in an era of universal free trade. Marx alone in that mid-nineteenth century laid bare the true character of capitalism as a transient historical stage with a beginning and an end; analysed its laws of motion and deduced therefrom where it would lead; and charted the path forward, through the transition era of crisis and revolutionary struggles, for man to become the master of his destiny and reach to the future classless communist society. Today, now that we have lived through half a century of the general crisis of capitalism and the advance of the world socialist revolution, the spokesmen of twentieth century capitalism, and of its most typical art and literature, have fallen into black pessimism and despair, denounce the nineteenth century belief in progress as a false idol, proclaim that there is no rationality or law in existence, that all is senseless accident without meaning, which only doctrinaire fools would try to interpret, and that the world in general is run by malevolent devils. Marxism alone has never shared the blind self-satisfied false optimism of nineteenth century capitalism, nor the equally blind pessimism and nihilism of its twentieth century successors. Marxism has always represented that strength and freedom from illusions which is based on complete social consciousness of our epoch and our tasks, never denying or failing to face the grim ordeals and heavy struggles through which we have to pass—and there are still heavy battles in front both in Britain and internationally—but always with unfaltering revolutionary optimism based in confidence on the capacity of man to solve his problems and reach to the future communist society. ‘The teachings of Marxism’, declared Lenin, ‘are all-powerful because they are true’.

R.P.D.

CALL FOR GREEK FREEDOM

In our June issue:

MELINA MERCOURI, world-famous Greek actress, speaks out against the Athens dictatorship.