

Towards Fusion: Theoretical Formation and Ideological Struggle

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The Fusion of Marxist Scientific Theory with the Workers Movement:

The nature of Marx's scientific theory on the one hand and the nature of ideology on the other permits us to grasp the exact terms in which the problem of the historical birth, the existence and the action of Marxist-Leninist workers organizations has been posed and is posed today.

1. The first great principle of this fusion was formulated by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Kautsky: it is the principle of the *importation* into the existing workers' movement of the scientific doctrine produced *outside of the workingclass* by a bourgeois intellectual attached to the proletarian cause, Karl Marx. The workers' movement which existed in the 1840s in Europe was then subject to *ideologies*, at best proletarian (anarchist), or more or less petty bourgeois and utopian (Fourier, Owen, Proudhon). It could not, by itself, break out of the circle of *ideological* representations of its ends and means of action. We know that through its petty bourgeois moralizing, utopian and consequently reformist character this ideological representation was and remained dominated by the dominant ideology, that of the bourgeoisie. The social democratic workers' organizations have remained in this ideological reformist tradition to this day.

To produce the scientific doctrine of socialism it was necessary to call upon scientific and philosophical culture and exceptional intellectual abilities. An extraordinary sense of the need to break with ideological forms, in order to escape their influence and to discover the field of scientific knowledge was required. This discovery, this foundation of a new science and a new philosophy, was Marx's work of genius. It was also a hard fought struggle in which he utilized all his power and for which he sacrificed everything, in the midst of great poverty, for the sake of his work. Engels continued his work and Lenin gave it new impetus. The scientific doctrine was then *imported from outside*, in the course of a long and patient struggle into the workers' movement, until then under the domination of ideology, thereby transforming its theoretical basis.

2. The second great principle concerns the nature of the *historical union* established between Marx's scientific theory and the workers' movement. This historical union, whose effects dominate contemporary history, was the very opposite of an accident although it would have been a fortunate one. The workers' movement existed *before* Marx developed his doctrine, therefore its existence did not depend on Marx. The workers' movement is an objective reality, produced by the very necessity of resistance, of revolt, of the economic and political struggle of the workingclass; it is generated along with the class exploited by the capitalist mode of production.

We can establish this undeniable historical fact, which has not only withstood the worst trials (the smashing of the Paris Commune, imperialist wars, the destruction of the workingclass organizations in Italy, Germany, Spain, etc.), but has strengthened itself enormously in the course of time: the most important and broadest sections of the workers' movement *adopted as their doctrine the scientific theory of Marx* and applied it with success in their strategy and tactics, and at the same time in their methods and forms or organization and in their struggle.

This adoption was not achieved without difficulties. Decade after decade of experiences, or trials and struggles were necessary for history to consecrate this adoption. And even today the struggle continues, a struggle between the so-called "spontaneous" ideological conceptions of the workingclass, reformist, anarchist, blanquist, voluntarist and others, and the scientific doctrine of Marx and Engels. If the workers' movement adopted the scientific doctrine of Marx *against* its own "spontaneous" ideological tendencies, which are being born incessantly, and if it adopted it *of its own will*, without any force being imposed on it, it is because profound necessity presided over this adoption, that is, over the fusion of the workers' movement and the scientific doctrine of Marx.

This necessity rests entirely on the fact that Marx produced *objective knowledge* of capitalist society, he understood and demonstrated the necessity of class struggle, the necessity and the revolutionary role of the workers' movement and he supplied knowledge of the objective laws of its existence, its goals and its action. And if the workers movement adopted this doctrine it was because it *recognized in it*, in the Marxist doctrine, the objective theory of its own existence and its action, because it recognized in Marxist theory the theory which would enable it to see clearly the reality of the capitalist mode of production and its own struggles.

It was also because it recognized, through its experience, that this doctrine was true, that it gave to its struggle a foundation and objective means which were truly revolutionary: *it was because it knew that it recognized itself in it*. The scientific truth of the Marxist theory was what definitely sealed its union with the workers'

movement and made this union definitive. There is nothing in this fact of history which indicates the intervention of chance: everything reveals on the contrary, *its necessity and intelligence*.

3. *The third great principle* concerns the process by which this fusion was finally produced, and what means are necessary to ceaselessly maintain, reinforce and extend it. If the "importation" of Marxist theory demanded a process of great length and effort, it is because a tremendous amount of *education and of formation of Marxist theory* was needed on the one hand and at the same time a lengthy *ideological struggle* on the other.

It was necessary for Marx and Engels to patiently convince the best militant workers, the most conscious and sacrificing, of the necessity of abandoning the existing ideological basis and of adopting the basis of scientific socialism. This lengthy work of education took many forms: directly political action of Marx and Engels, theoretical formation of militants in the struggle itself (during the revolutionary period of the years 1848-49), scientific publications, conferences, propaganda, etc., and naturally, in a very rapid manner, when conditions were more advanced, *organizational measures* on a national and later an international plane. It is possible, even without this relationship, to see the history of the First International as the history of the long struggle waged by Marx, Engels and their supporters to win the workers' movement to the fundamental principles of Marxist theory.

But at the same time that they were undertaking this work of education and the formation of scientific theory, Marx and Engels and their followers were obliged to develop a lengthy patient and intense struggle against the ideologies which then dominated the workers' movement and its organizations, and against the religious, political, and moral ideology of the bourgeoisie. *Theoretical formation* on the one hand, *ideological struggle* on the other, these are two absolutely essential forms, two absolutely essential conditions which have presided over the profound transformation of the spontaneous ideology of the workers' movement--two tasks which have never ceased and still remain standing as vital tasks, indispensable for the existence and development of the world revolutionary movement, and which condition today the transition to socialism, the construction of socialism and even later will condition the transition to communism. *Theoretical formation, ideological struggle*: two concepts which we must now examine in detail.

Theoretical Formation and Ideological Struggle:

The problem which we are now examining is distinct from the problem of the nature of the Marxist science, of the conditions of the growth and development of its theoretical practice. We now presuppose that Marxist science exists as a truly living science, that it continues growing and enriching itself with new discoveries, relating them to the questions posed by the practice of the workers' movement and the development of the sciences. We consider Marxist science as existing, possessing

at a given moment of its development, a definite body of theoretical principles, of analyses, of scientific proofs, and conclusions, that is, of knowledges. And we pose the following question: by what means can, and should, we transmit this scientific doctrine to the consciousness and the practice of the organizations of the workingclass?

To respond to this question it is necessary to detour, this time to examine in what the *practice* of the workers' movement in general consists, independently of the scientific character of the principles which were provided it by Marx.

Beginning from the moment in which the workers' movement acquired certain consistency and gave itself a minimum of organization, its *practice* was subject to objective laws, founded in the class relations of capitalist society and at the same time in the entire structure of that society. The practice of the workers' movement, even in its utopian and reformist forms of organization, developed itself on three planes, corresponding to the three "levels" which constitute society: the *economic* plane, the *political* plane, the *ideological* plane. This law is not peculiar to the workers' movement; it applies to all political movements, whatever their social nature and whatever their objectives. Naturally the class nature of the different movements or political parties causes considerable variation in the forms of this general law, but it imposes itself on all political movements, even in their variation.

The action of the workers' movement therefore necessarily takes the form of a three-fold struggle: *economic* struggle, *political* struggle, *ideological* struggle. We know that the economic struggle was the first to develop, in sporadic forms at first, but each time more organized. In *Capital* Marx shows us that the first phases of the economic struggle of the proletariat developed around various themes, the most important of which were the struggle for the decrease in the length of the work day, the struggle for the defense and increase in wages, etc. Other economic themes intervened in the continuation of the history of the workers' movement: the struggle for job security, the struggle for social funds (social security), the struggle for accident insurance, etc. In every case it was a question of a struggle carried out on the plane of *economic exploitation* therefore at the level of the *relations of production themselves*. This practice corresponds to the immediate practice of the workers, to the suffering imposed by economic exploitation of which they are the victims, to the direct experience of this exploitation and to the direct comprehension in this experience of the economic *fact* of exploitation. In large-scale modern industry the wage laborers, concentrated by the technical forms of production, perceive directly the class relations of economic exploitation, and see in the capitalist the one who exploits them and benefits from their exploitation.

The direct experience of wage labor and economic exploitation is incapable of supplying *knowledge of the mechanisms* of the economy of the capitalist mode of production, but it is sufficient for the wage workers to become conscious of their exploitation and to bind and organize them in their economic struggle. This struggle develops in the context of the *unions* created by the workers themselves without the help of Marxist science: these unions can continue and struggle without the above mentioned support and this is why union activity constitutes an open source for the growth of economic *reformism*, that is, of the conception which expects from *the economic struggle alone* the revolutionary transformation of society. It is this

apolitical "trade unionist" conception which nurtures the anarcho-syndicalist tradition in the workers' movement, disdaining all politics. In this sense Marx could say that trade unionism, that is, the organization of the economic struggle on a reformist basis and on the reduction of all struggles of the workers' movement to the economic struggle, constitutes the extreme point, the limit of the evolution of the workers' movement "left to its own resources."

Nevertheless the economic struggle always comes up against, like it or not, *political realities*, which intervene directly and violently into the course of the economic struggle: in the form of the repression of protests, strikes and revolts, by the forces of the bourgeois state and the law (the police, the army, the courts, etc.); out of which arises the experience, won in the economic struggle itself, of the need for a *political struggle*, distinct from the economic struggle. At this point things become more complicated inasmuch as wage workers cannot obtain from *political reality* an experience comparable to that which they obtain from their daily practice, from the reality of economic exploitation, since the forms of intervention of class political power are very often--with the exception of violent manifestation--open although intermittent, hidden behind the cover of "law" or of juridical, moral or religious justifications of the existence of the state.

Because of this the political struggle of the workingclass is more difficult to understand and to organize than the economic struggle. To advance and organize this struggle on its true terrain it is necessary to recognize, at least partially, the nature and the role of the state in class struggles, the relationship existing between political domination and its juridical cover on the one hand and economic exploitation on the other. Something other than the intermittent and blind experience of a certain number of the effects of the existence of the class state is necessary, a *knowledge* of the mechanism of bourgeois society is required. In this domain the "spontaneous" conceptions of the proletariat which preside over its political actions are considerably influenced by bourgeois conceptions, by the juridical, political and moral categories of the bourgeoisie. The utopianism, the anarchism, and the reformism which is observed not only in the beginnings of the political struggle of the workers' movement but throughout its history arises from this fact. This anarchism and political reformism perpetuate themselves and are incessantly reborn within the workingclass through the influence and the pressures of the institutions of bourgeois ideology.

In its political struggle, and the limits of that struggle, the workers' movement is confronted by *ideological realities*, dominated by the ideology of the bourgeois class. This is the reason for the third aspect of the struggle of the workers' movement: *the ideological struggle*. In social conflicts the workers' movement as all other political movements, confronts this experience: all struggle implies the intervention of the "consciousness" of men all struggle creates a conflict between *convictions, beliefs, representations* of the world. The economic struggle and the political struggle also include these conflicts of the ideological struggle. The ideological struggle is not then limited to a particular domain, by means of the representations which men have of their world, of their place, or their role, of their conditions and their future, the whole of human activity, all the fields of struggle are encompassed.

The ideological struggle is everywhere since it is inseparable from the ideas in which men live their relationship with society and its conflicts. There cannot exist economic or political struggle without men bringing to it their ideas as well as their forces. Nevertheless the ideological struggle can and must be also considered as a struggle in its own field: *that of ideology*, that of religious, moral, juridical, political, aesthetic, philosophical ideas. In this sense the ideological struggle is a struggle distinct from the other forms of struggle, it has for its object and terrain the objective reality of *ideology*, and as its goal the freeing of this field to the greatest possible degree from the domination of bourgeois ideology and the transformation of it, to place it in the service of the interests of the workers' movement.

Considered in this light the ideological struggle is therefore also a specific struggle, which is carried out in the domain of ideology itself, and which must take into account its own nature, the nature and the laws of ideology. Without *knowledge* of the nature, laws and specific mechanisms of ideology, of the domination of one region over others, of the different levels (non-theorized, theorized) of the existence of ideology, without knowledge of the class nature of the law of the domination of ideology by the dominant class--it is possible only to carry out the ideological struggle blindly only partial results, but never definitive profound results can be obtained.

It is in this domain that the limitations of the natural "spontaneous" possibilities of the workers' movement appear in their most explosive form, given that, lacking scientific knowledge of the nature and social function of ideology, the "spontaneous" ideological struggle of the workingclass is realized on the basis of an ideology subject to the insurmountable influence of the ideology of the bourgeois class. It is above all in the terrain of the ideological struggle where the necessity of a foreign intervention: *that of science*, makes itself felt. This intervention is most important given that, as we have seen, the ideological struggle accompanies all other forms of struggle and is absolutely decisive because all the forms of struggle of the workingclass and the *insufficiencies in the ideological conceptions* of the workers' movement, left to themselves, produce anarchist, anarcho-syndicalist and reformist conceptions of their economic and political struggles.

We can sum up this analysis in the following manner. The very nature of the workers' movement, independently of any influence from the scientific theory of Marx, is engaged in a three-fold struggle: economic struggle, political struggle, ideological struggle. In the unity of these three distinct struggles, the representation which the workers' movement has of the nature of society and its evolution, of the nature of the goals to be advanced and the means to be employed to correctly advance that struggle, fixes the general orientation of the movement. The struggle therefore depends on the *ideology* of the workers movement. It is ideology which directly orients the conception which it has of the ideological struggle and consequently the manner in which it should be conducted to transform the existing ideology; it is this ideology which directly orients the conception which the workers' movement has of its economic and political struggles, of their relations and consequently the manner in which it conducts these struggles.

At this level everything is related to the content of the ideology of the workers' movement. Also we know that this ideology remains a prisoner of the fundamental categories (religious, juridical, moral, political) of the dominant bourgeois class, even in the expression which the "spontaneous" ideology of the workingclass gives to its opposition to the dominant bourgeois ideology. Everything is therefore related to the transformation of the ideology of the workingclass: to the transformation which enables that ideology to escape the influence of bourgeois ideology, to be subject to a new influence, that of the Marxist science of society. It is precisely on this point that the intervention of the Marxist science into the workers' movement is founded and justified. And it is the very nature of ideology and its laws which determine the appropriate means to secure the transformation of the "spontaneous" reformist ideology of the workers' movement into a new ideology, of a scientific and revolutionary character.

The necessity of the transformation of existing ideology, in the first place in the workingclass itself, and afterwards, in the social strata which are naturally allied with it, enables us to understand the nature of the means for this transformation: ideological struggle and theoretical formation. These two means constitute decisive links in the fusion of Marxist theory with the workers' movement and consequently with the practice of the Marxist workers' movement.

Ideological struggle can be defined as the struggle waged in the objective domain of ideology against the domination of bourgeois ideology by means of the transformation of the existing ideology (ideology of the workingclass, ideology of the classes which can be converted into its allies) in such a way that it serves the objective interest of the workers' movement in its struggle for revolution and later in its struggle for the building of socialism. Ideological struggle is a struggle within ideology: in order to wage it on a correct theoretical basis, it presupposes as an absolute condition knowledge of the scientific theory of Marx, therefore it presupposes theoretical formation.

These two links: ideological struggle and theoretical formation, although they are both decisive, nevertheless they are not on the same plane; they imply from the point of view of their nature a relation of dominance and dependence: it is theoretical formation which directs the ideological struggle, which is its theoretical and practical base. In the practice of daily activity, theoretical formation and ideological struggle are constantly and necessarily interconnected: therefore there is a tendency to confuse them, and consequently to forget their difference in principle and at the same time their relationship of dominance-dependence. For this reason it is necessary from the point of view of theory to insist at the same time on the distinction in principle between theoretical formation and ideological struggle and the principle of the dominance of the former with respect to the latter.

Through theoretical formation Marx's doctrine could penetrate the workers movement, through permanent theoretical formation it continues penetrating and reinforcing itself in the workers movement. Theoretical formation is an essential task of communist organizations, a permanent task, which must be continued unceasingly and put to the test daily, taking into account the developments and discoveries of marxist scientific theory. It is very well known that theoretical formation has been absolutely indispensable in the past in winning the workers movement to the

scientific theory of Marx. Its importance is not so well understood today when the theory of Marx directly inspires the most important organizations of the workingclass* and the entire life of the socialist countries. Nevertheless, and in spite of these spectacular historical results our theoretical work is not finished nor can it ever be.

When we say that the ideology of the working class was transformed by Marxist theory, this is not to say that the workingclass, which in other times was "spontaneously" reformist, today has definitely been converted to Marxism. Only its vanguard, its most conscious section possesses a Marxist ideology. The great mass of the workingclass is still in part subject to ideologies of a reformist character. And within the vanguard of the workingclass itself, constituted by the communist party, there exist great inequalities in the levels of theoretical consciousness. Within the vanguard only the best militants possess, at least in the field of historical materialism, a true theoretical formation, and it is from among these that the theoreticians and investigators capable of advancing Marxist scientific theory can be recruited. It is this constant inequality in the level of theoretical consciousness which is the basis for the demand for a force which can ceaselessly renew itself, although put to the test daily, within the theoretical practice of present day Marxist organizations. It is also this reality which demands an exact conception, as rigorously defined as possible, of theoretical formation.

By theoretical formation we mean the process of education, of study and of work, by which a militant comes to possess, not only the conclusions of the two aspects of Marxist theory (historical materialism and dialectical materialism), not only its theoretical principles, not only certain analyses and detailed proofs, but the whole of the theory, its content, its analyses, its proofs, its principles, and its conclusions in their indissoluble scientific connection. We therefore mean quite literally a profound study and assimilation of all the primary works on which the knowledge of Marxist theory is based. We can, to represent this objective, employ the admirable formula of Spinoza; Spinoza said that a science which is only conclusions is not a science at all, that a true science is one of premises (principles) and conclusions, in the integral process of the proof of their necessity. Theoretical formation far from being an initiation into the simple conclusions or into the principles on the one hand and the conclusions on the other, is on the contrary the profound assimilation of the proof of the conclusions beginning from the principles, the assimilation of the profound life of a science in its spirit and its very methods, it is a formation which requires the participation of anyone who wants to receive and acquire the scientific spirit which constitutes the science itself and without which it would never have been born, without which it would never have known how to develop itself.

Theoretical formation is thus something entirely different from simple economic, political or ideological formation; these are stages previous to theoretical formation, they must be illuminated by it and based on it, but they cannot be confused with it, since they are no more than partial stages of it. To use a practical formulation: there can be no true theoretical formation without the study of Marxist theory (science of history, Marxist philosophy) in its

* Althusser is referring here to the situation in Europe (translator).

clearest form, not only in the texts of Lenin, but in the work which was the foundation of all the Leninist texts, to which they incessantly refer: to *Capital*, without an attentive, reflective and profound study of the greatest text of Marxist theory which has far from revealed its full value to us.

Theoretical formation so defined can without a doubt be considered as an ideal which is not accessible to everyone, taking into account the enormous difficulties which the reading and study of *Capital* represents, the degree of intellectual formation of many militants, and finally the limited time which can be devoted to this study. We can and must necessarily consider successive and progressive degrees of theoretical formation and organize them in accordance with individuals and circumstances. But this very division, if it is to be carried out successfully, presupposes the effective recognition of theoretical formation, its nature and necessity. It presupposes an absolutely clear understanding of the ultimate objective of theoretical formation: to form militants capable one day of transforming themselves into scientists. To achieve this end we must not aim too high, but in aiming at the right height we can define exactly the stages of progression which lead to our objective, the stages and the means appropriate to each.

Why give so much importance to theoretical practice? Because it represents an intermediate link without which, the development of Marxist theory through the entire practice of the Communist party and consequently, the profound transformation of the ideology of the workingclass, are impossible. A two-fold reason justifies the exception importance which the communist parties have attributed in the past and must attribute now to theoretical formation. It is in fact by well developed theoretical practice that militants, whatever their social origins, can be transformed into intellectuals in the most rigorous sense of the term, that is, into scientists, capable of one day advancing Marxist theoretical investigation. But it is also through a precise knowledge of the Marxist-Leninist science, represented by theoretical formation which makes it possible to define and carry out the economic and political action and the ideological struggle of the party (its objective and its methods) on the basis of the Marxist-Leninist science.

The party cannot be content with proclaiming its fidelity to the principles of the Marxist-Leninist science. What radically distinguishes it from other workers' organizations is not this simple proclamation, it is concrete application, practice, in its organizational forms, in its methods, in its scientific analyses of concrete situations, of Marxist scientific theory. It is not the mere proclamation of principles, but their application in its work which distinguishes the party from other workers' organizations. Finally what distinguishes the party is that, while it recognizes the specificity and need for theory, for theoretical practice and investigation, and their appropriate conditions of life and operation, it refuses to reserve, as if it had a monopoly on them, knowledge of theory a few specialists, to some leaders and intellectuals, and abandon its practical application to the rest of the militants. On the contrary, the party wants, in accordance with Marxist theory itself, to unite on the broadest possible basis, theory with its practical application, to the benefit not only of practice but also of theory--and we must desire to extend as widely as possible

theoretical formation to the greatest possible number of militants, and to constantly educate them in theory, to make of them militants in the most complete sense of the word, capable of analysing and understanding the situations in which they must act, and thus of helping the party define its policies.

They should be militants capable of producing new observations, beginning with their own practice, and from it new knowledge which will serve as raw materials, which can be worked on together with the best Marxist theoreticians and investigators. To say the entire orientation and all the principles of action of the party rest on Marxist-Leninist theory and to say that the practical experience of the political action of the masses and the party is indispensable for the development of history, is to affirm a fundamental truth that makes no sense if it does not assume a concrete form, if it does not create a real and fruitful link in two senses, by necessary organizational means, between theory and its development on the one hand, and the economic, political and ideological practices of the party on the other. To create this link in both senses is the task of the party. The absolutely decisive strength of this link consists precisely in the greatest possible development of theoretical formation in the greatest possible number of militants.

In all these matters it is indispensable to understand the unity of the entire organic process which links in both ways, scientific theory and revolutionary practice, as the specific distinction of the different moments and the articulation of their unity. This two-fold relation is indispensable as we have seen for positive reasons, at once theoretical and practical. It is equally indispensable to free us from existing negative confusions in the realm of theory and of practice. We would fall into pure and simple idealism if we were to separate theory from practice, if we did not give to theory a practical existence, not only in its application but also in the educational and organizational forms which assure the passage of theory to practice and its realization in it. We would fall into the same idealism if we did not permit theory in its own form to to enrich itself from all the experiences, all the results and real discoveries of practice.

But we would fall into another form of idealism just as serious as the previous one, pragmatism, if we did not recognize the irreplaceable specificity of theoretical practice, if we were to confuse theory with its application, if we were to treat not in words but in deeds, theory, theoretical investigation and theoretical formation as pure and simple aides to practice, as "servants of politics", if we were to relegate theory to pure and simple commentary on immediate political practice. In these forms of idealism we can clearly see that conceptual errors directly correspond to tragic practical consequences, which, as the history of the workers' movement shows, can seriously alter not only the very practice of the movement, which can give rise to sectarianism and opportunism, but also theory itself which may be brought to a standstill or even may begin to regress owing to dogmatic or pragmatic idealism.

A careful distinction between theoretical formation and ideological struggle is therefore essential, so as not to fall into confusions which in the last instance have their origin in treating ideology as science, that is, in reducing science

to the limits of ideology. To finish our analysis we come back to the great principle with which we began: *the distinction between science and ideology*. Without this distinction it is impossible to understand the specificity of Marxism as a science, the nature of the union between Marxism and the workers' movement and all the theoretical and practical consequences which flow from it. We would like to indicate that this article does not intend to be, in its limitations, exhaustive: it was obliged to proceed by means of simplification and schematization: it has left suspended a good many important problems. We hope that in some small way it can supply a correct idea of the decisive importance of the distinction between science and ideology and the light which this distinction can shed on an entire series of problems, theoretical and practical, which the Marxist organizations and individuals must confront and resolve in their struggle for revolution and the transition to socialism.

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