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The Critique of Marxism

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Conclusion

Marx's theories have not been sustained by events. His system could be best designated as "The Dialectic Falsification of History." There are no "laws of history" and progress from one stage of development to another is not inevitable. Marxism is no longer relevant to the growing number of people who are alarmed by the unprecedented proliferation of the economic and military powers of the modern State and the concomitant regimentation of the individual. Nationalization of property and means of production, even in a "socialist" State, as advocated by Marx and Engels, does not fundamentally alter the basic inequality between those wielding power and those subject to it. Even Marxists no longer believe that the State will "wither away". Freedom is not merely the reflection of the mode of production but the essence of life. The dogma that science, philosophy, the arts, ethics and free institutions only mirror the economic mode of production is giving way to the conviction that these phenomena have an independent share in the shaping of history. A theory for the renewal of society that attaches little or no importance to these supreme values does not merit the respect of freedom-loving people.

“...the most fundamental difference between medieval and modern economic thought is that while modern economic thought normally refers to expediency, medieval economic thought starts from the position that there is a moral authority to which considerations of economic expediency must be subordinated... the fact that the socialist doctrine should have been expounded as early as the middle of the 14th century is a reminder that economic thought contained elements much more modern than is sometimes suggested...” (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, pp. 31, 32, 42, 43)

Thorough research by highly qualified historians leads to the inescapable conclusion that capitalism is not, as the marxists insist, the indispensable progressive precondition for the transition to socialism. Actually, capitalism usurped the creative achievements of mankind and reversed the libertarian trend of society, the better to subjugate the people to the greed of the capitalists and the despotism of the State.

Indisputable evidence also demonstrates that capitalism is not inevitable and that there is a libertarian alternative: a flexible society permeated by the principles of individual and collective freedom, solidarity, self-management, federalism and free agreement. The potential for such a society existed in the village communities, brotherhoods, guilds and Free Cities [communes] of the Middle Ages. Kropotkin did not, as is charged, idealize the Free Cities. In analysing medieval society he took into account “the internal conflicts with which the history of these communes is filled... street riots... blood spilled... reprisals, etc...” But Kropotkin did prove that “all the elements, as well as the fact itself, of large human groupings, freely constituted, were already there...” (*The State ...*) Writing thirty years later, Tawney too, found that “the rise of the Free Cities was one of the glories of medieval Europe and the germ of every subsequent advance in civilization...” (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p. 55)

From the original:

The author has meant this pamphlet to be provocative, **The Soil of Liberty** staff is not in complete agreement with everything in the pamphlet but felt it should be printed. We welcome comments for future magazine issues of **Soil of Liberty**.

This pamphlet is the second published by **Soil of Liberty**. The first, “*The Relevance of Anarchism to Modern Society*”, is also by Sam Dolgoff and is available for 55¢, including postage. Bulk rates are available.

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Soil of Liberty also has a book service and a catalog will soon be available. Magazine subscriptions are \$3 -\$4 a-year. Address is on the back cover.

Foreword

This summation is written in response to young people seeking clarification of the main issues involved in the classic controversy between Marxists and anarchists. The subject matter is arranged in the form of extracts from relevant sources. The anarchists as well as the marxists speak for themselves in quotations culled from their works. Since the non-anarchist critique of Marxism has taken a libertarian direction, we have also included extracts from such writings.

Our critique excludes forgotten earlier writings disavowed by Marx and Engels and deals only with their mature works. In his preface to Marx’s *Critique of Political Economy*, Engels revealed that he and Marx had “...abandoned the manuscript of *The Ger*ma*n Ideology* [1846] to the gnawing criticism of the mice...” A Russian visitor, Alexis Vodin, who interviewed Engels in 1893, wrote that Engels “was very embarrassed when I expressed interest in Marx and Engels’ earlier writings...” (see David

McLellan, *Marx Before Marxism*, 1970, p. 208) Only in 1927 was an edition of the earlier writings published by the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow.

Passages marked in [brackets] are mine. Those marked in (parentheses) are the writer's. References are also marked in (parentheses).

Economic Determinism

Marxism is based upon the theory of Economic Determinism (or its equivalent terms – Historical Materialism, Dialectical Materialism, Materialistic Conception of History, Scientific Socialism, etc.). Economic Determinism constitutes the essence of Marxism. It is defined by Engels in this famous passage from his introduction to Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*:

"...all past history was the history of class struggles... these warring classes of society are always the products of the conditions of production and exchange, in a word, of the economic condition of the time; [Engels' emphasis] therefore the economic structure of society always forms the real basis from which, in the last analysis, is to be explained, the whole superstructure of legal and political institutions [the state] as well as the religious, philosophical, and other conceptions of each historical period.. .all moral theories are the product, in the last analysis, of the economic stage which society reached at that particular epoch... with the same certainty, can we deduce the social revolution from the existing social conditions and the principles of political economy... now, a materialist conception of history has been propounded and the way found to explain man's consciousness by his being, instead of his being by his consciousness..."

[Marx formulates this more concisely]

"..,it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence – but their social existence which determines their consciousness..."
(*Critique of Political Economy*)

Since Kropotkin developed these ideas in 1897, further research by reputable historians and political scientists has confirmed his analysis. Edward Jencks wrote:

"...the typical village of the middle ages in Western Europe and indeed, of people in a corresponding stage the world over, was not like the typical village of modern France or England, merely a locality in which neighbours who carry on their work independently happen to live, but a community, carrying on its work as a single body of co-partners governed by customary rules, to which all must conform, it was not competitive... the self-governing municipality, or borough, was the highest achievement of the patriarchal principle; and after a dark period of repression, it gallantly took up the struggle against the newer ideas of absolute rule which produced the institution of the State.... it was founded on the undying principles of brotherhood, freedom and voluntary co-operation, as opposed to subordination, regimentation or compulsory service..." (*The State and the Nation*, pp. 94, 116, 118, 137, Jenck's comments concern patriarchal society in transition to the free cities or communes discussed by Kropotkin)

R.H. Tawney suggests that:

"it may do well to remember that the characteristic... of the medieval guild was that if it sprang from economic needs, it claimed at least to subordinate them to social needs... preserve a rough equality among the good men of the mystery [association]; check economic egotism by insisting that every brother shall share his good fortune with another and-stand by his neighbour in need, resist the encroachments of a conscienceless money-power; preserve professional standards of training and craftsmanship, and to repress by a strict corporate discipline the natural appetite of each to snatch advantages for himself to the detriment of all... much that is now mechanical was then personal, intimate and direct, and there was little room for organization on a scale too vast for the standards that are applied to individuals, or the doctrine that silences scruples and closes all accounts with the final plea of economic expediency..."

the drudge tied triumphantly to a semi-automatic machine...” (*Technics and Civilization*, p. 183)

Kropotkin indignantly refutes the false allegations of the “historians and economists who teach us that the village commune, having become an outdated form of land possession which hampered progress, had to disappear under the action of ‘natural economic forces’...” Kropotkin denounces the Marxian “socialists who claim to be ‘scientific socialists’ who repeat this stock fable... this odious calculated lie... History abounds with documents to prove that the village commune was in the first place deprived of all its powers by the State, of its independence, and that afterwards the lands were either stolen with the connivance of the State or confiscated by the State directly... Have we not learned at school that the State had performed the great service of creating, out of the ruins of feudal society, national unions which had been previously made impossible by the rivalries between cities?”

Kropotkin calls attention to the fact that the “Dialectical Materialists” do not even begin to appreciate the:

“...communist movement that existed in the 11th and 12th centuries... this movement with its virile affirmation of the individual; which succeeded in creating a society through the free federation of towns and villages, was the complete negation of the unitarian centralizing Roman outlook. Nor is it linked to any historic personality or central institution... Society was literally covered with a network of sworn brotherhoods; of guilds for mutual aid... it is even very doubtful whether there was a single man in that period, free man or serf, who did not belong to a brotherhood or some guild, as well as to his commune... In the course of a hundred years this movement spread in an impressive harmonious way throughout Europe covering Scotland, France, the Low Countries, Italy, Germany, Poland, Russia. In these cities [communes] sheltered by their conquered liberties, inspired by free agreement and free initiative, a whole new civilization grew up and flourished in ways unparalleled to this day.” (*The State: Its Historic Role*)

“...the course of history is governed by inner laws operating in spite of the consciously desired aims of individuals...” (Engels, *Ludwig Feurbach*, p. 48, emphasis added)

The Critique

Over a century ago Bakunin anticipated much the same arguments against Marx’s theory of Economic Determinism as did later writers. He stressed the point that causes and effects are continuously interacting and replacing themselves. Causes become effects. Effects, in turn, become causes. For example:

“...Marx holds that the political condition of each country is always., the faithful expression of its economic situation.... He takes no account of other factors in history such as the ever-present reaction of political, juridical and religious institutions on the economic situation. He says poverty produces political slavery, the State, [but ignores the fact] that political slavery, the State, reproduces, in its turn, and maintains poverty as a condition for its own existence.... Marx ignores completely ... a multitude of ethnological, climatological and historic causes,... which independent of the economic conditions of each country, [Bakunin stresses the ‘spirit of revolt’] exert a considerable influence on its destinies and even on its economic development...” (Letter to *La Liberte* – 1872)

J.M. Cameron, English historian and sociologist:

“...it is not true that in history we are faced, first, with men associating together in economic life, and then with men worshipping the gods, inventing moral codes, .and justifying this or that political order.... We are faced with men engaged in all these activities at once. If we approach history without preconceptions, we have no means by which we can determine certain attitudes to be primary and others secondary. All we know is that they co-exist. As sociologists and historians we ought not single out certain phenomena and describe them as causes and other phenomena as effects. The only assumption

that accords with the scientific is that we are faced with a developing whole the parts of which are continuously interacting..." (*Scrutiny of Marxism*, p. 28; 1948)

The article entitled "Dialectics" in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1969) also stresses the often decisive importance of non-economic factors in the shaping of history, grossly underestimated by Marx:

"...many economic facts are just as much effects as they are causes ...changes in artistic tastes, in political institutions, in social traditions and even religious doctrines influence consumption of commodities and thereby become determinants of production and law is just as much a determinant as it is a product of economic life. Thus a maze of causal relationships results and with causes and effects indistinguishable in many instances, no social program could be built on this foundation..."

It may be objected that both Cameron and the Encyclopedia, are too conservative and unfair to Marxism. But R.H. Tawney, a social thinker and historian whose works are highly recommended by the Marxists, voices much the same criticism of Marx's theory of Economic Determinism:

"...that men should have thought as they did is sometimes as significant as they should have acted as they did... there is an evolution of ideas as well as organisms, and the quality of civilization depends less on physical qualities, than on a complex structure of habits, knowledge and beliefs, the destruction of which would be followed in a year by the death of half the human race... there is a moral and religious, as well as material environment which sets its stamp on the individual... and the effects of changes in this environment are no less profound..." (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, pp. 18-19)

Engels himself unintentionally (to be sure) pinpoints the major fallacy of Economic Determinism:

"...causes [the economic structure of society] and effects, [the whole legal, political, moral, etc. 'superstructure'], are constantly changing places and what is now or here an effect becomes there or then a cause and vice-versa... truly, when a man is in possession of

A few examples to refute that falsehood:

John U. Nef:

"...the most startling progress of the physical and mathematical sciences in the 16th and early 17th centuries occurred in parts of Europe that did not participate directly in the speeding-up of industrial growth in England and Northern Europe..." Nef describes the "boom in mining and metallurgy between the late 15th and early 16th centuries... when much of continental Europe was built or rebuilt in the new Renaissance style of architecture..." Nef also documents the "remarkable industrial development especially striking in Northern Italy, parts of Spain, the southern low countries and southern Germany..." (*The Conquest of the Material World*, pp. 326, 42)*

Peter Kropotkin:

"All modern industry came to us from these free cities [of the Middle Ages]. In three centuries, industries and the arts attained such perfection that our century has only been able to surpass them in speed of production, but rarely in quality or the intrinsic beauty of the product... in each of its manifestations, our technical progress is only the child of the civilization that grew up within the free communes... All the great discoveries made by modern science; the compass, the clock, the watch, printing, maritime discoveries, gunpowder, the laws of gravitation, atmospheric pressure, of which the steam engine is a development, the rudiments of chemistry, the scientific methods already outlined by Roger Bacon and applied in the Italian universities... Where do all these things originate if not in the free cities? In the civilization which was developed under the protection of communal liberties... in the 16th century Europe was covered with rich cities... their caravans covered the continent, their vessels ploughed the seas and the rivers..." (*The State: Its Historic Role*, p. 29)

"The cities of the 13th century [writes Lewis Mumford] were far brighter and cleaner and better ordered than the new victorian towns. Medieval hospitals were more spacious and more sanitary than the hospitals of the victorian towns. In many parts of Europe the medieval workers had a demonstrably higher standard of living than

process...” (Introduction to the 1972 edition of Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution*)

Marx’s failure to appreciate this truth permeates his grossly distorted conceptions.

Marx on Capitalism: The Dialectical Falsification of History

Marx’s notion that the “bourgeoisie has created more colossal productive forces in scarce one hundred years than all preceding generations together...” (*Communist Manifesto*) is a gross distortion. Lewis Mumford’s classic study, *Technics and Civilization*, an objective assessment of the relationship of capitalism to technology, corrects Marx on this point:

“While technics owes an honest debt to capitalism, as it does to war, capitalism and technics must be clearly distinguished at every stage ... the machine took on characteristics that had nothing essential to do with the technical process or the forms of work... it was because of capitalism that the handicraft industries in Europe and other parts of the world were recklessly destroyed by machine products; even when machine products were inferior to the things they replaced..., the machine has suffered from the sins of capitalism..., contrariwise, capitalism has taken credit for the machine...”

“Although there is a close historical association of modern technics and modern capitalism, there is no necessary connection between them.* Capitalism has existed in other civilizations, which had relatively low technical development, and technics made steady improvements from the 10th to the 15th Century without the special incentives of capitalism... between the 10th and the 18th Century all the technical preparations for capitalism had already taken place...” (emphasis added, pp. 26, 27, 28) Which refutes the silly remark that “no earlier century had even a presentiment that such [capitalist] productive forces [existed]...” (*Communist Manifesto*)*

the final and ultimate truth, it is only natural that he should have a certain contempt for erring and unscientific humanity...” (*Anti-Duhring*, pp. 36, 29)

It follows from this that the fundamental dogma of Marxism, Economic Determinism – “the final and ultimate truth”, is, according to Engels himself, demonstrably false.

Economic Determinism: The Role of the Proletariat

Economic Determinism is a doctrine which in practice saps the revolutionary vitality of the masses, conditions them to accept capitalism and to co-operate with their rulers in their own enslavement. To effect social changes, the workers must, according to Marx, adapt themselves to the slow, progressive evolution of economic structures because “no social formation ever disappears before all the productive forces are developed for which it has room, and new higher relations of production never appear before the necessary material conditions are matured in the womb of the old society.” (*Critique of Political Economy*)

It takes a long time. “We say to the workers and the petty bourgeoisie; ‘suffer in bourgeois society which creates, by developing industry, the material means for the formation of the new society which will free all of you.’” [Marx on the lessons of the 1848 revolutions.] No matter how great the suffering, the workers are promoting progress because “in the evolution of society, ancient, asiatic, feudal and bourgeois modes of production constitute progressive epochs in the economic systems of society...” (*Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*)

On the same grounds, Engels goes so far as to defend the institution of slavery: “The introduction of slavery in Greece under the conditions of that time, was a great step forward..., it was slavery that first made possible the development of agriculture and indus-

try and with it the flower of the ancient world, Hellenism. Without slavery, no Greek State, no Greek art and science; without slavery no Roman Empire; without Hellenism and the Roman Empire as a basis, no Europe... without the slavery of antiquity no modern socialism..." (*Anti-Duhring*, p. 203)

The consistent Economic Determinist could just as well argue on the same grounds that since production had developed to a point where there was a shortage of labor power, and since the shortage was made up by converting prisoners-of-war into slaves, therefore, wars were necessary and ultimately beneficial.

In his polemic against Proudhon (*The Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847, quoted on p. 357 in *Handbook of Marxism*, International, 1935), Marx maintained that slavery in America was still an economic necessity, arguing that "slavery is an economic category, like any other. Slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery or credit..., without slavery you have no cotton, without cotton, you have no modern industry..., without slavery, North America, the most progressive of countries would be turned into a primitive country. Abolish slavery and you will have wiped America off the map of nations."

Question: How progressive is a country whose very existence depends on slavery?

Franz Mehring, Marx's official biographer, explains that "Marx not only shows that machinery and large scale industry created greater misery than any mode of production known in history, but that also in their ceaseless revolutionisation of capitalist society they are preparing the way for a higher social form... the machine which degrades the worker into its mere appendage, creates at the same time the increasing productive forces of society so that all members of society will enjoy a life worthy of human beings, which could not be done before because pre-capitalist societies were too poor."

Since, according to the *Communist Manifesto*, the bourgeoisie is the bearer of large-scale industry, it is in the interests of the

the working class to make a [PROLETARIAN] Social Revolution. The terrible economic depression of 1929, profoundly divided and demoralized the workers and their political parties who claim to represent them... in Europe the crisis aggravated nationalism and brought on the fascist racist reaction. In America, the 'New Deal' of Roosevelt; in France, the popular front... strengthened capitalism..." (*Le Contrat Social*, January 1967. I have inserted and emphasized the PROLETARIAN to establish the point that neither the largely agrarian Russian nor the Chinese Revolution were really proletarian.)

The Marxist Max Schachtman, in his introduction to Franz Mehring's biography of Karl Marx, admits the "incontestable fact that the class struggle has not... led to the rule of the working class that was to be transitional-to a classless society — the perspective that Marx himself held to be his unique contribution — cannot be explained away..." And Max Eastman in his introduction to an anthology of Marx and Engels writings, likewise objects that "the very first sentence of the *Communist Manifesto*, 'the History of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles' shows the disposition to read one's own interests into the definition of facts..."

Marx and most authoritarian socialists did not give much thought to the forms of organization that might translate into reality the ideal of a free, stateless society. The dialectical method which Marx employed in working out his theory of Dialectical Materialism is essentially a philosophy of perpetual conflict between opposing tendencies or forces interrupted by temporary adjustments. There is conflict, but society is also a vast interlocking network of co-operative labour and the very existence of mankind depends upon this inner cohesion.

In this connection, Paul Avrich emphasizes that "mankind, in fact, owes its existence to mutual assistance. The theories of Hegel, Marx and Darwin notwithstanding, Kropotkin held that co-operation rather than conflict lies at the root of the historical

similar profits by the innumerable official collectors who channelled the direct tax into the treasury.... Industry in the 18th Century was dying... all the State was capable of doing was to tighten the screws for the workers; depopulate the countryside; spread misery in the towns; reduce millions of human beings to a state of starvation and impose industrial serfdom,, already, at the close of the 14th Century, an edict by Edward III, King of England, decreed that 'every alliance, connivance, meetings, enactments and solemn oaths made or to be made between carpenters and masons [or any other trades] are null and void'.., in 1801 the French government itself undertook to appoint mayors and syndics in each of the thirty thousand communes..." (The State: Its Historic Role, pp. 41-43, 46-47)

Engels justified the tyranny of the State on the ground that "forcible measures of Louis 14th, made it easier for the bourgeoisie to carry through their revolution". But the bourgeoisie, in the name of the "common will" fought the absolute monarchy for the exclusive right to exploit the workers; just as they crushed the revolt of the workers and the *sans culottes* during the French Revolution a century later. Marx and Engels conceded that the bourgeoisie "established new classes, new oppressions... in place of the old ones..." (*Communist Manifesto*). But their inability to learn from historical events that no State can ever play a revolutionary role, persists to this day.

Marx's whole theory of history and economic laws led him to predict both the inevitable collapse of capitalism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. But capitalism has not only been able to survive. It has actually become more entrenched by adopting, in various degrees, social-democratic reform measures; thereby absorbing the labour and socialist movements into the structure of the State capitalist economic system (-sometimes designated "welfare state" or "welfare capitalism ")The political scientist Michel Collinet points out that "if the cyclical crises of capitalism are, as Marx predicted, a source of misery and insecurity; it is also a fact that after more than a hundred years, it has not led

workers to help the bourgeoisie to seize power as soon as possible and as soon as the bourgeoisie develops industry, to overthrow it. The workers should co-operate gladly because "as long as the rising mode of production furthers the general aims of society, it is enthusiastically welcomed even by those who suffer most from its corresponding mode of distribution. This was the case with the English workers in the beginnings of large scale industry" (Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, pp. 167-8). A deliberate brazen falsehood if ever there was one and a calculated insult to the valiant English workers who fought for freedom with unexampled courage. (See E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*)

Mehring explains that "Marx and Engels aimed at utilizing the Franco-Prussian War as thoroughly as possible in the interests of the proletarian struggle for emancipation... Engels condemned the leaders of the German Socialist Party, William Liebknecht and August Bebel, because they abstained from voting war credits... The situation is: Germany has been forced into a war to defend its national existence against Bonaparte... Bonaparte's war policy was directed against the national unity Germany and, since the establishment of a united German state is necessary for the ultimate emancipation of the workers, the war must be supported. Bismarck [in prosecuting the war and unifying Germany] is doing a share of our work."

Engels wrote that "militarism dominates and is swallowing Europe. But this militarism carries within itself the seed of its own destruction... Military rivalry forces states to spend more and more money on armaments thus hastening financial catastrophe..., compulsory military service makes the whole people familiar with the use of arms... the people revolt against the commanding military lords.., the armies of the princes become transformed into the armies of the People; the military machine refuses to work and militarism collapses by the dialectic of its own evolution... gunpowder and other inventions not only revolutionized warfare,

but in revolutionizing industry, warfare represents an economic advance.” (*Anti-Duhring*, p. 192)

In an 1872 letter to the anarchist Carlo Cafiero, Engels declared that both Bismarck and King Victor Emanuel rendered immense service to the Revolution by creating political centralization in their respective countries. “...just as in economic evolution there is the tendency for capital to concentrate in fewer hands and for the smaller capitalist to be swallowed by the large, so likewise in political evolution it is inevitable that the small states should be absorbed by the great...” (Franz Mehring quotes Engels in *Karl Marx*, pp. 164-5)

In criticizing [the young, pre-anarchist – Ed.] Bakunin’s *Appeal to the Slavs* – which called for the independence of the Slavic peoples and the destruction of the Russian Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Prussia, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (Feb. 14 1849,-edited by Marx) declared that “no Slavic people has a future for the simple reason that they lack the indispensable political and industrial conditions for independence... the stubborn Czechs and the Slovaks should be grateful to the Germans who have taken the trouble to civilize them by introducing them to commerce, industry, agricultural science and education... What would Texas or California have gained if it would be in the hands of the lazy Mexicans?”

It follows from the above quotation that militants who fight against slavery and for racial equality, people who refuse to help the bourgeoisie bosses, people who are against war and militarism, people who are for the freedom and independence of small nations against imperialist domination, are, according to marxist theory, “dialectically” counter-revolutionists against their oppressors who are unconsciously preparing the road for socialism.

Engels extols parliamentary political action and class collaboration – “...the two million voters for the German Social Democratic Party plus the young men and women non-voters who stand behind them... form the most compact ‘shock troops’ of the interna-

nance forbade any household to make soap for its own use. Rights to exploit tin and coal deposits in the north of England, glass and other industries were sold to the highest bidders...”

“When England acquired its colonial empire, immense territories were sold to monopolists for ridiculously low payments from which they derived enormous profits in a few years... Queen Elizabeth sold exclusive rights to commercial companies to trade in the East Indies and all lands east of the Cape of Good Hope and west of the Straits of Magellan. Charles II gave exclusive rights to exploit Virginia to his father-in-law. Rights were sold to the Hudson Bay Company for 20% of the profits, etc...” (*Nationalism and Culture*, 1937, pp. 125, 126, 430, 431)

Peter Kropotkin denounced:

“...revolutionaries who glorify the State... the modern radical is a centralist, Statist and rabid Jacobin, and the Socialists (Marxists included) fall in step. Just as the Florentines at the end of the 15th Century knew no better than to call upon the dictatorship of the State to save themselves from the Patricians; so the socialists only call upon the same gods, the dictatorship of the State to save themselves from the horrors of the economic regime, created by the very same State!”

“The role of the nascent State in the 16th and 17th Centuries was to destroy the independence of the cities; to pillage the rich guilds of the merchants and artisans; to concentrate in its hands the external commerce; to lay hands on the internal administration of the guilds and subject internal commerce and all manufacturing to the last detail to the control of a host of officials and in this way, to kill industry and the arts; taking over the local militias and the whole municipal administration; crushing the weak in the interests of the strong by taxation and ruining countries by wars and the lands were either simply stolen by the rich with the connivance of the State or confiscated by the State directly...”

Kropotkin calls attention to the:

“...shameless waste of the Ministers and the Court; the monstrous profits of the private concessionaires who collected indirect taxes and

In opposition to Marx, Bakunin argued that the bourgeois-minded workers in the advanced industrialized countries are not going to make revolutions [This is incorrect—Bakunin was often sceptical about the upper layer of workers in all countries, and never rejected the Western working class— Ed.].

History proved Bakunin right and Marx wrong. The most notable revolutions of this century have been those that broke out in Russia and China. Nor did the October Revolution, as Lenin expected, initiate a series of proletarian upheavals in the advanced countries of Western Europe that were deemed ripe for the Social Revolution.

Marx attached slight importance to psychological factors in revolution, but Bakunin insisted that revolution was impossible for people who had “lost the habit of freedom.” He left more room for people’s will, their aspiration for freedom and equality and “the instinct of revolt” which constitutes the “revolutionary consciousness” of oppressed peoples.

Rudolf Rocker writes that:

“...in France, crafts and industries were brought under the regimentation of the State... rigorous regulations and methods of work were decreed for all industries... an army of officials took care that no one deviated even by a hair’s breadth from established norms. Tailors were told how many stitches to make in sewing a sleeve into a coat; the cooper, how many hoops to put around a barrel. The State not only decreed the length, width and colour of woven fabrics but specified the number of threads in each weave. Violations were punished by confiscation of goods; in serious cases, by destruction of material, tools, workshops, etc... Just as agricultural production under serfdom declined sharply; so did the Royal ordinances and regimentation wreck industry and bring France to the brink of ruin...”

“As in France, English industry too, was subjected to severe restrictions. The Court was interested only in filling the Royal treasury. Under the reign of Charles I, the monopoly for the manufacture of soap was sold to a company of London soap boilers and a special ordi-

tional Proletarian Army.., if this goes on, we shall at the close of the century win over the greater part of the middle social layers, the petty bourgeoisie as well as the small peasants, and we shall come to be the decisive power in the land.... The capitalist parties perish because of the legal means set up by themselves,... the Social Democratic revolution... is getting on first rate while abiding by the law...” (pamphlet, “The Revolutionary Act”)

This catastrophic policy which led to the emasculation of the socialist movement and its absorption into the capitalist State, rendered the German socialist movement (numerically the strongest in the world) impotent to resist the First World War as well as the rise of Nazi fascism — historical tragedies whose magnitude it is impossible to assess.

Nature of the State

That economic factors to a greater or lesser degree, depending on circumstances, shape events is an indisputable fact. To assert, however, that the ultimate cause of all social changes is to be found only in changes in the mode and relations of production is a gross distortion which cannot be sustained by the facts of history.

The marxist misconception of history stems primarily from erroneous ideas about the origin and nature of the State and its preponderant role in the shaping of the economic and social life of humanity.

According to the *Communist Manifesto*, “the executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.” Bakunin maintained that the State is not merely an agent of the dominant economic class, but that the State also constitutes a class in itself and is the most powerful of all by virtue of its monopoly of armed force and its sovereignty over all other social institutions. In contrast to Marx, Bakunin argued that

the State is not only the product but also the creator and perpetuator of economic, political and social inequality.

Bakunin's critique has in this respect been sustained by modern social thinkers. Sidney Hook states flatly that "the existence of the Soviet Union refutes the theory of historical materialism ... since the basic economic changes were achieved through political action [the State]." (*Marx and the Marxists*, p. 124) It was this development which led Rudolf Hilferding, a noted Marxist economist, to revise his ideas about the nature of the State: "...the Marxist sectarian cannot grasp the idea that the present-day State power, having achieved independence, is unfolding its enormous strength according to its own laws, subjecting social forces and compelling them to serve its ends... Therefore, neither the Russian, nor totalitarian systems in general, is determined by the character of the economy. On the contrary, it is the economy that is determined by the policy of the ruling power. An analogy to the totalitarian State may be found in the era of the Roman Empire in the regime of the Praetorians and their emperors...." (quoted by Hook in *Marx and the Marxists*, p. 241)

In this connection the political scientist, Michel Collinet, observes that "for Lenin, the Revolution is not the necessary consequence of the productive forces, but of a militarized party of professional revolutionaries who knew how to use an effective strategy to profit by political occasions...." (*Le Contrat Social*, Jan. 1957)

The Marx-Engels notion that in primitive society the State originally arose to "safeguard the common interests of tribal societies against external enemies and later to protect the economic and political position of the ruling class" is false. The contention that exploitation arose through "purely economic causes... and not at all by the State... that historically, private property by no means makes appearance as the result of robbery and violence" is also false. (Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, pp. 167, 171, 184)

Evidence to the contrary is overwhelming. All competent historians and anthropologists, among them Edward Jenks, agree that:

to obtain an equal share in the spoils of war." (*Nationalism and Culture*, p. 379)

As compared to the catastrophic impact of wars in this century, even the most protracted struggles between workers and employers are of minor significance.

Marx surely underestimated the importance of nationalism in shaping history. He thought that nationalism would be superseded by class struggles because the proletariat would become class conscious in the process of struggle.

In this connection Lewis Mumford disagrees with Marx:

"When Marx wrote in the 1850s, nationalism seemed to him to be a dying movement... it had in fact, taken on a new life... with the massing of the population into national States which continued during the 19th Century, the national struggle for political power cut at right angle to the class struggle... the struggle for political power now became a struggle between States for command of exploitable areas... after 1850, nationalism became the drill master of the restless proletariat who identified themselves with the all-powerful State" (*Technics and Civilization*, pp. 189, 190, 191)

Marx and Engels believed that "modern industrial labour subjection to capitalism, in England, France, America and Germany, has stripped the proletariat of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion, are to the proletariat so many bourgeois prejudices." (*Communist Manifesto*)

The trouble with this argument is that workers still nurse these prejudices and act accordingly. What a worker thinks and feels may determine his or her reaction to events more than what he or she does for a living.

With the coming of World War I (which according to Marxist theory should have signalled the long delayed collapse of capitalism), the proletariat – "the only really revolutionary class" (*Communist Manifesto*), became rabid nationalists, and even the German Socialist Party deputies in the Reichstag patriotically voted war credits.

The fact is that wars between States devastated whole nations. The State wrecked the economy, stifled initiative and held back progress for centuries.

The Class Struggle

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels declare that their “theoretical conclusions are based on the class struggle.” That class struggles are a factor in social change no one will deny. But the dogma that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (*Communist Manifesto*) is false.

Gaston Leval demonstrates that “wars between migratory hordes and sedentary populations, nations and States, count in history more than class wars — particularly in Europe and Asia... In Spain, recall the six centuries of war against the Arabs. Read the literature of the 10th to the 16th Centuries to realize how little part the class war played as compared to religious and racial factors; how little the class war figured in the conquest of Sicily and almost all of Italy, Flanders and part of France by the Spanish armies; the international religious wars between Christians and Mohammedans; or the conquest of Latin America by Spain — the people of Spain sided with the kings...” (*La Falacia del Marxismo*, pp 121-2)

Contrary to the *Communist Manifesto*, the Plebians did not constitute a revolutionary class. In the centuries of the Roman Empire, both the Patricians and the Plebians approved the enslavement of prisoners-of-war, who were drafted to reinforce the armies of Caesar, Lucullus, and Pompeii. Although the Patricians represented the big landholders and the Plebians the small farmers; the Plebians were not interested in the abolition of privilege or the establishment of a new economic order. “Their sole concern,” writes Rudolf Rocker, “was to participate in the privileges of the Patricians and

“...the State, in its origin, was not an economic, but a military institution... formed by conquest and plunder... unwilling themselves to practice the patient arts of husbandry... the invading hosts settled down like a swarm of locusts on their prey... the rich vineyards and fields of Europe... No permanent State was ever built unaided by an invading host... the State itself, though intensely military in character, imposes itself on a solid base of permanent agriculture, which will supply its needs by wealth drawn from the fruitful soil... the primitive State was simply a band of warriors under a military leader — Clovis, Rurik, Norman William — but as time went on... as the band of warriors settled down as lords and rulers of their fiefs, as hereditary successors to office and title became recognized... the State began to assume in varied forms the character of an institution, a piece of machinery which maintains a perpetual existence, despite the death of kings and barons...” (Edward Jenks, *The State and the Nation*, 1919, pp. 130, 131)

“... *the State is essentially military in character... its methods are mainly non-productive... they do not produce values, but merely preserve or destroy them.. From its earliest stages its policy has been annexation or plunder of its own or alien communities... it creates property by handing over the resources of the community to individuals or small groups and this is, in effect, what the State had done by creating individual and private property and protecting it with its overwhelming power... the State received its return from this reckless squandering of the resources of the community...” (Jenks, p. 237, my emphasis)

“...the Roman Empire rests on force only, a brute force let loose by the lowest appetites... it bound every man to his occupation... chained him and his descendants to the same post [occupation], established a real caste system... the wholesale destruction of wealth created by the subject peoples ... Rome’s industry in the second and first centuries, B.C. had been war and the spoliation of the vanquished... the fruits of conquest were dissipated in a century...” (Ferdinand Lot, *The End*

of the Ancient World and the Beginnings of the Middle Ages, pp. 8, 65, 84, 85, 82)

We cite a few examples from the anarchist Gaston Leval's excellent analysis of Marxism which awaits translation into English:

"...the Visigoth dynasty [ruling much of Iberia and France after the Roman Empire fell – Ed.] did not derive its origin from the institution of private property nor from changes in the mode of production. It was the creation of the 'conquistadores' who institutionalized the domination and economic exploitation of the conquered peoples..."

"...what became France, was founded by Clovis [first king of the Franks – Ed.], a bandit who murdered his rivals and with a savage horde of warriors from the north routed the Romans and the Germans [Visigoths – Ed]. With each victory he and his successors augmented their forces, conquered more territories, and by plunder, rapine and extortion, engineered the economic subjugation of the conquered peoples, dividing property and the spoils of war among themselves. The true creators of the State were the militarists and the politicians, not only in Spain and France, but also in Flanders [Belgium], Germany, Russia and other northern European countries, and in Italy..."

"...the State by its very nature, tends to have a life of its own. It is a parasitic institution living at the expense of society... in Latin America the Spanish and Portuguese 'conquistadores' seized the land of the natives, plundered the urban communities, and by brute force, not by changes in the mode of production, imposed feudal regimes which to this day weigh so heavily on the economic and political institutions of so many nations... to give land to its soldiers and officials, the invaders changed the social structure of the conquered territories..."

To illustrate the predominance of the State, Leval points out that during the post-war period in the newly established small States "there already appeared Ministers, a repressive apparatus, jails, and executioners... There already appear classes. The new classes do not owe their existence to technological developments or changes in the mode of production. They are brought into being by the newly

created State — the institutionalized political authority controlling or dominating the economic and social life of the people..."

"...the economy of the newly established States, may deteriorate; mass starvation and disease may decimate the population; but the ministries grow. The police and armed forces multiply. The new bureaucracy flourishes. A new powerful class exploits the peasants, levies taxes, and suffocates the people in an avalanche of rules and restrictions..."

"...Rene' Dumont, a renowned agronomist and sociologist, reports from visits to some of the new States that the principal industry of these new countries is governmental administration. In fifteen former French colonies newly independent — economic production declined, but the production of politicians grew. In Dahomey, the wages of the governmental bureaucracy absorbs 70% of the national income. The situation in Gabon is just as bad or worse, as it is in other countries Dumont visited. As soon as a peasant learns to read and write he goes to the city to become a functionary..." (above quotes from Gaston Leval, *La Falacia del Marxismo*, Mexico City, 1967, pp. 116, 117, 118)

Bakunin anticipated just such a development: "...in Turkish Serbia [after independence – Ed.] ... there is only one class in control of the government — the bureaucracy. The one and only function of the State, therefore, is to exploit the Serbian people in order to provide the bureaucrats with all the comforts of life..." (*Statism and Anarchy*)

The State and Production

Marx and Engels praised the bourgeoisie for advancing the economy by "lumping together... loosely connected provinces... or small independent states into one nation, with one government, one code of laws etc..." (*Communist Manifesto*). This assumption, that political centralization — the State, facilitates economic development is a dangerous illusion refuted by massive evidence.