

CHRISTIANS AND THE CLASS-STRUGGLE

MARXISM is not a philosophy. It is a technique of revolution. Hence the critique of those whose minds are fixed in academic ways of thought nearly always misses the point. We are not dealing with a system of thinking which claims its confirmation in the identities of being, but with one which claims its confirmation in action and in practice. Moreover it does not confirm itself by referring back to traditional ways of action or established practice; it claims its verification in the unity of thought with revolutionary practice. And it is not merely catastrophic in its method; far less is it merely Utopian. That type of criticism, therefore, which paints Marxism as a Utopian system in order to ridicule it as such may have some bearing on the various forms of Utopian socialism which Marx and his followers always fiercely attacked, but practically none on Marxism.

The basic concept of dialectic materialism is matter in motion, and essentially so. "Motion," says Engels (*Anti-Dühring*) "is the mode of existence of matter." To apply this principle to society, the social situation must be understood in its process if we are to enter at all into the Marxian outlook. For Marxism is a system of social dynamics and it is often rejected at the cost of losing also any grasp of history as a real and living development rather than as a marginal note to an *a priori* thesis independent of our carnal lives.

The principle of the unity of theory and practice is the first determinant of dialectic materialism. A few of its implications must be stated before we can approach the doctrine of class struggle. It means the abandonment of all truths (academic or religious-imaginary in the Marxian phraseology) which are incapable of verification in sensible experience or external practice. Moreover, thought being the property of an organism in action, it means that no attention can be paid to those whose present action is irrelevant to their beliefs. "Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the 'this-sidedness' of his thinking. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a

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purely scholastic question" (Marx: *Theses on Feuerbach*). The various polemics of Marx against "reformist," Utopian and counter-revolutionary movements within the body of the working-class movement and the commentaries of Marx on the progress of proletarian revolution in his own day show the development of this principle in forming the concept of class, which emerges with dramatic completeness in the *Communist Manifesto*.

This concept of class has nothing to do with that differentiation of men through vocation, profession, social dignity and function which makes for a natural hierarchy in static orders of society. It is a thing unknown except in capitalist society. It represents not merely a rivalry of interests such as may have been at any time between craftsmen of one trade and another or between the trader and the peasant, but rather a profound opposition of interests generated by the mode of production itself. The capitalist spirit in breaking adrift from an order of society in which the economic motive was more or less closely governed by moral, social and religious considerations, proposed to itself as the ultimate motive of economic activity the ideal of maximum individual gain. And as Fanfani points out,¹ while "the idea of subsistence implies traditionalism, that of unlimited production implies a dynamism, that is, an ever unsatisfied, ever increasing economic rationalization of means." The Catholic economist is echoed in these more sanguine words of the *Communist Manifesto*, "The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society." And in support of this statement of the dynamic nature of capitalist production we have the following from *Quadragesimo Anno*, "This accumulation of power, the characteristic note of the modern economic order, is a natural result of limitless free competition, which permits the survival of those only who are the strongest, which often means those who fight most relentlessly. . . ."

In particular the struggle of modern economic life has

¹ *Catholicism, Protestantism and Capitalism*, by Amintore Fanfani (Sheed & Ward).

involved the mobilization of all those sources from which the capitalist has to draw his elements of production. These sources include the possessions of the people (ready at call for the capitalist in the form of bank credit), raw materials and labour. Labour ranks as a raw material of capitalist production. Ideally, from the point of view of the employer of labour, it should be always and immediately exchangeable, always responsive *en bloc* to the command of the capitalist expressed in the offer of the minimum price.² The demand of capitalism is that labour should behave on the market as any other commodity; that it should be easily calculable and easily dispensed with. In the balance sheet of capitalist production labour figures as a debit entry, that is, an item weighed against the capitalist's profit. Where this profit is the mainspring of production it is clear that a fundamental opposition of interests is formulated whenever the balance sheet of a capitalist concern is drawn up. Moreover, where interest on money borrowed is reckoned as a constant item of expenditure, it is to the capitalist's advantage that labour should assume the form of a variable, that is, an item of which the proportion to the gross production costs may be always cut by improved factory methods and the installation of machinery.

History shows that labour has been approximated to this ideal condition of a market commodity by a process of social deracination far more revolutionary than any economic expedient proposed by Marx. Throughout their history, as Marx observes, the bourgeoisie have been the revolutionary class. While Marxism proposes the abolition of the one dominant class of modern economic society, the bourgeoisie during the rise and development of the capitalist mode of

² Cf. Prof. Goetz Briefs, *Le Proletariat Industriel*: "... envisager le travail à la façon d'une matière exploitable coûteuse et en faire une chose économique. Une matière d'exploitation doit être aussi bon marché que possible et cependant féconde, autant que possible susceptible d'adaptation, autant que possible d'un emploi peu onéreux et peu encombrant; il faut qu'elle se prête à une évaluation complète, qu'on puisse l'échanger sans surprise et à tout moment: tels sont aussi les caractères d'un travail 'idéal' envisagé du point de vue de l'exploitation et de l'entreprise."

production abolished or rendered meaningless all the social orders of the ancient regime.³ Apart from the Marxian theorists with which this essay is concerned, the logic of this process is clearly shown by Fanfani in the book I have already cited. Granted, as a fact, the rise to dominance of the capitalist spirit in society; granted in consequence the struggle for universal rule of the aim of maximum individual profit as the end of economic activity; granted the insecurity of the competitive pursuit of wealth, according to which the producer who cannot cut his costs is bound for bankruptcy; granted the ineffectuality in practice of religious and moral considerations in imposing any strong external restraint on the power-seeking bourgeoisie; it becomes less difficult to understand the ruthlessness with which peasants were driven from the soil and common lands openly filched from the people, with which the traditional safeguards of the modest craftsman and trader were dissipated, guilds and agricultural families scattered to form a destitute and hungry army haunting the outskirts of the towns. Of this drive to destitution Cobbett was a witness and Marx a curiously skilled interpreter. Capitalist man had made a free choice; the rest was implied in the logic of its consequences. That a choice of such incredible wickedness could have been made is the one thing difficult for us to understand. Nevertheless the same choice is substantially repeated whenever, under pressure of overwhelming modern conditions, a capitalist enterprise reasserts its principles in fighting for its life. We are told, "Business is business," and, "We are not here for our health."

It is seen, then, that "a class is differentiated in bourgeois society consisting of an aggregation of individuals, all of whom enter the production process as *commodities*—units of productive force, purchased as are the inanimate means of production in the 'free' market, and paid for at market rates" (T. A. Jackson: *Dialectics*). Marxism accepts this

³ Cf. Jacques Maritain's Introduction to Goetz Briefs, *op. cit.*: "La division de la société en 'classes' est tout autre chose que la division de la société en 'ordres,' et il fallait que les ordres fussent abolis pour que les classes apparussent."

differentiation, a division which is plainly enough the fact. But Marxism goes further. It rigorously excludes any other criteria as a basis of its judgment and its action than the criteria of bourgeois materialism. "We can say without fear of error that communism is integral capitalism. . . Far from rejecting the mechanization of life begun by capitalism, it sets out to complete it. Far from denying that economics are the principal basis of civilization, it maintains on the contrary that they are the *unique* basis."⁴ Further, the "proletarianization" of all workers not yet uprooted from ownership and tradition by capitalism is implied by communism. Marxism is unthinkable except in the terms of capitalist thought and capitalist intolerance. It is the completest, most exact and most honest expression of the aims man proposed to himself when he relegated religion to the week-ends and to his subjective convictions; when, in fact, he decided that as far as the working week was concerned economic activity should serve an exclusively economic end. For the rest, within the capitalist terms of reference, it is the integral expression of the self-interest of the proletariat.

The industrial proletariat is a reality. Its unity is guaranteed by the community and uniform servility of its labour, by its uniform relation as a raw material to the process of production. The class struggle is also a reality. This is no species of rioting and sporadic violence from which a man can as easily abstain as from a fight at a street corner. In so far as we want the things capitalism produces; more particularly in so far as we want the kind of security that capitalism offers to the investors of money, we are already participating in it. We are interested parties and likely to act in defence of our interests. At least so much may be conceded to the Marxian principle of the unity of theory and practice.

All the peculiar instruments of capitalistic production were formed and developed in pursuit of the capitalistic aim of unlimited economic gain to the producer. They were directed towards the continuous cheapening of the means of production in terms of cost to the capitalist; to the increasing

⁴ Tristan d'Athayde: *Fragments de sociologie chrétienne*, cited by Fanfani, *op. cit.*

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mobilization of all social goods, including the labour power of the masses of the people and the possessions of all men, in the service of profit to the capitalist; to the standardization of all labour and of products in obedience to the requirements of machine production for world-wide markets. The instruments of capitalism, its systems of brokerage and markets, its machinery, its book-keeping, its joint stock companies, its banking and currency, its system of hiring labour, received their concrete determination from the dynamically progressive and accumulative spirit of the new social order. All these things considered in themselves as static conceptions were and are ideally capable of modification in accordance with the requirements of moral society. Nevertheless, considered as concrete realities really existing and conditioned in the course of human history, they are shaped to serve the end of an anti-moral economic order. Four propositions show the nature of the moral problem:

1. The instruments of capitalism considered in isolation from the dynamic movement which brings them into being are as a-moral as the works of a clock.

2. The dynamic movement of capitalism considered in relation to its precise end of profit, and lacking all implied restraint to the intensity of the profit-making motive, deliberately cuts itself off from, or refuses to be ruled by, the moral law.

3. All human acts considered in the concrete, as they really exist, are moral as essentially relating to the perfection of human beings through their acts in conformity with the end of all human existence.

4. The instruments of capitalism do not really exist in isolation from its dynamic movement, but are conditioned in their real existence in relation to it.

I conclude that not only must the Christian conscience reject the capitalistic economic motive, but also that in so far as a Christian deliberately and freely uses the economic instruments which present themselves to him he is most strictly bound to change them, in accordance not necessarily with a static conception of materially fixed social rightness,

but with the movement of human perfection; which also has its dynamism.

I conclude secondly that the intrinsic opposition of class interests generated by the dynamic movement of capitalism has, strictly as such, no claim to the partizanship of the Christian conscience.

I conclude thirdly that in so far as Christians freely and deliberately participate in the movement and the fruits of capitalism without bringing pressure to bear on that system to change it and all its instruments over which they have any measure of control, they do themselves foster, participate and take sides in the fundamental opposition of interests generated by capitalism. The name for the most fundamental of these oppositions is the class struggle.

I conclude fourthly that since the Christian conscience has been sufficiently warned against taking the side of Marxian revolution, Christians will in fact, so long as they remain in a state of critical impotence and practical blindness, inevitably find themselves on the side of the oppressors of the labourer. For the class struggle is a reality of which, for us, the price of ignorance is the betrayal of the workers.

The Christian's approach to the class struggle involves two factors without which it has no claim to be called Christian.

1. A total detachment from the capitalist spirit. In response to the capitalist's "We are not here for our health" his reply must clearly be, "We are here for our sanctification."

2. A profound attachment to the cause of the oppressed. The Christian and the Christian alone knows in its fulness the nature of this oppression.

This attachment involves a recognition of the industrial proletariat as such, and the recognition that at any particular moment the just demand of the proletariat may materially coincide with the immediate demand of revolutionary Marxism. Who is to decide to what end that material demand shall serve? Ultimately only the proletariat can decide. For it is from the proletariat that the demand comes. To a greater extent than we care to admit our future is in the hands of the workers. Whatever schemes of improvement may be offered from above to rectify a system in which "bodily labour,

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which was decreed by Providence for the good of man's body and soul even after original sin, has everywhere been changed into an instrument of strange perversion: for dead matter leaves the factory ennobled and transformed, where men are corrupted and degraded,"⁵ must depend on the workers' acceptance of them.

Though the abandonment of that responsibility which the will owes to God leads directly in the present situation to one of two things, Communist revolution or Nationalist war, the only possible alternative to this abandonment is precisely the choice of the difficult: of the arduous task of building against forces already drunk with destruction. And it is the worker himself who must rebuild that responsibility which capitalism has banished from his working life. He can be helped to this task, but he cannot be treated as if some slight adjustment in the technique of the system rendered it unnecessary. He can be helped by those alone who, being wholly given to Christ, are more destitute than himself. But his betrayal is in the hands of decent, respectable, religious, and fatally self-interested people whose good intentions, however sincere, are socially inefficacious; who have been accustomed to think that a scheme of social reform offered to a government to "implement" is a sufficient discharge of duty towards the poor of Christ; who will accept deliverance from the guns of any hero whose victory may silence for a time the cry of the oppressed on the consciences of the comfortably well-to-do.

Tu, autem, Domine, miserere nobis.

BERNARD KELLY.

⁵ *Quadragesimo Anno*, C.T.S. translation, p. 62.