

COMMUNISM: LATER PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENTS

IAN HISLOP, O.P.

FRUITFUL discussion between persons who accept different philosophic systems postulates a point of contact, an area of agreement in terms of which one system can translate the terms of another system. This is so because any highly developed system has its own terminology.

So far as Marxism goes, we are like the spectators of a strange and complicated game, whose players speak a foreign language. For the Marxist philosophy is not a contemplative activity, it is not a system in the sense that Hegelianism is a system; it is simply the deduction of positive knowledge from the world through our minds. Any philosophic statement is simply the best approximate account of a given situation which is valid relative to this or that point in the historical process. The situation is constituted by matter and its laws translated into the human head. This is not an 'insight into', but a mirroring of, environmental conditionment.

The difficulty is that words like 'peace', 'justice', and so on, have the same sound for Marxists and ourselves but mean quite different things. For the Marxist there is no meaning about the word 'justice' save as it receives definition in relation to one or other stage in the historical process. Indeed, only statements formulated in terms of matter in motion can be true. Hence the philosophic opinions of others are interpreted by him in relation to their exponents' social conditionment and only affect him as 'feudal' or 'bourgeois'.

For Lenin, all 'abstractions must be taken back into the concrete, for they are only true in so far as they reject the history of developing production'. He saw his philosophic task as that of a guardian of the Marx-Engels theory in its purity. Though he lacked the prophetic note—expressed in slogans of genius—that were a feature of the thought of Marx, he developed Marxism in that he developed by means of the concept of the collective motivation of classes the activist element in Marxism. His descriptions have a flexibility because, though a strict Marxist in principle, he

recognised that the principles must be applied differently to different stages in development.

He was scientific in that he was not Utopian. His philosophy is a call for action based on consciousness of the situation created by the interplay of economic forces. This situation is not political but rather an exemplification in a particular context of the laws of motion. Consciousness of the situation is scientific in so far as it is seen that a given situation necessitates its own negation.

From this it follows that spontaneous action is not enough, for it implies lack of consciousness of the irreconcilable opposition, that mere reform is to be rejected since it implies working with the condemned context. The task of revolutionary theory is to make the proletariat conscious of the economic-material conditionment of the present situation as it affects all classes of the population. The revolution must therefore be destructive of all previous systems.

Whether or not Lenin recognised a 'dualism', in that mind could not be for him just matter, and whether his theory of creating—by revolutionary action—the conditions for Socialism are or are not in harmony with the general thesis of the inevitability of the historical process and the definition of 'freedom' as the appreciation of necessity, need not delay us. The point is rather that his theory repudiates any ethical descriptions in terms of 'rights', any metaphysical notion of 'good'. It consists in a ruthless and quite sincere acceptance of Marxist principles as ultimate. To matter in motion the individual must conform or be destroyed: his personal consciousness is relative and accidental.

The sole test the Communist (i.e. the convinced existent Communist) recognises is history. He cannot be refuted by academic argumentation, because, though his approach is rational, he is enclosed within an interpretation of 'process' which is all-inclusive. The sole refutation to which he is exposed is that of events. If Communism is to be refuted, not for us or for objective observers, but for them, it can only be by a transference of Christian principle from the realm of theory and the printed page into concrete reality. It is only the use of matter in and for Christ, both in the personal and on the public level, that will redeem the times.