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# Paradoxes in the Communist Theory of Marxism

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In their first joint work *The Holy Family* Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels define the theory of their social teaching as *real humanism*, contrasting it with the abstract speculative humanism of the Young Hegelians, who in their radical criticism of the status quo did not venture to raise the question about the need to socialize the means of production and thereby abolish private property and wage labour, characterized by the authors as hired slavery. In actual fact the founders of Marxism came to call these essentially communist views *communism* only in their second joint effort, namely, *The German Ideology*. In this work, while expounding the fundamental tenets of the materialistic understanding of history as a theoretical foundation of communism, Marx and Engels make concrete their views on the real preconditions for the communist reconstruction of society. The point is in the objective *necessity for the abolition* 'of a state of affairs in which relations become independent of individuals, in which individuality is subservient to chance and the personal relations of individuals are subordinated to general class relations' (Marx & Engels, 1846, III, 'Conclusion to "The Unique"').[1] What is needed then in order to abolish these social relations that enslave a human individual? What are the *objective* conditions essential for solving this great task? As Marx and Engels write, 'We have also shown that the abolition of division of labour is determined by the development of intercourse [here the term *intercourse* denotes the relations of production, as is seen from the entire content of *The German Ideology*] and productive forces to such a degree of universality that private property and division of labour become fetters on them. We have further shown that private property can be abolished only on condition of *an all-round development of individuals* [my italics], precisely because the existing form of intercourse and the existing productive forces are all-embracing and only individuals that are developing in an all-round fashion can appropriate them, i.e. can turn them into free manifestations of their lives' *(ibid.)*.

The conclusion to be drawn from the above theses is explicit: individuals' *comprehensive* development (if such development were ever possible or necessary) is a long way in the future. The issue of abolishing the division of labour (if it were


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ever possible or necessary) is also far in the future, belonging to a remote historical perspective beyond the foreseeable future. In *The German Ideology* division of labour and private property are viewed as identical concepts, which is definitely invalid. Subsequently, Marx and Engels specify their theory as to the need to abolish the division of labour, emphasizing that the issue concerns existing forms of the division of labour, in particular the differences between intellectual and manual labour, and between town and country. In *Capital* Marx analyses the division of labour as a specific productive force, i.e. shows the great importance of division of labour for the development of production. The division of labour implies *specialization*, i.e. a productive line of work restricted to specific limits, without which success in any field is hardly possible at all.

The idea of the individual's *comprehensive* development is undoubtedly related to belief in the need to abolish division of labour and in many respects it is also *utopian*. As a matter of fact, the individual's *comprehensive* development is impossible and hardly necessary. Even if you could imagine a comprehensively knowledgeable individual, it inevitably brings to mind the fact that this person lacks the ability to concentrate on some specific line in his vocation. What is needed is not comprehensive but *versatile* development of individuals, which is conducive to both their productive activity and their keeping fit and efficient in their capacity for work.

The issue of abolishing private ownership of the means of production therefore concerns such a remote future that in principle it defies any scientific definition. However, the phrase following the quotation above comes as a shock: 'We have shown that at the present time individuals must abolish private property, because the productive forces and forms of intercourse have developed so far that, under the domination of private property, they have become destructive forces, and because the contradiction between the classes has reached its extreme limit' *(ibid.)*.

How can we reconcile these explicitly incompatible statements, even though they seem to form a linguistic unit? It is impossible. The ideas above represent a relation of mutually exclusive rather than interdependent contraries. The proposition is ambivalent. In contrast to the first part of the quotation, where Marx and Engels provide a sober, realistic account of the preconditions for a *post-capitalist* social order (it is irrelevant what it will be called or is called by Marx and Engels; the essential point is that capitalism is not eternal and will inevitably give way to another social order), the latter part contains a utopian demand for the immediate abolition of private property and a clearly erroneous allegation that, owing to the existence of private property, productive forces have turned into destructive forces. The historical experience gained by the founders of Marxism in their lifetime refuted completely their notions about the role private ownership of the means of production played in the development of productive forces. Recent times also disprove this fundamental tenet of Marxism.

Furthermore, the above quotation from *The German Ideology* stresses that class antagonism 'has reached its extreme limit'. The same treatise points to numerous actions by exploited workers against their capitalist employers. The most crucial uprisings are cited in every history textbook, such as the 1831 weavers' revolt in Lyon and the 1844 rebellion of weavers in Silesia. The founders of Marxism characterize these uprisings as a regular liberation movement of the proletariat.

In the first rough copy of *The Communist Manifesto* drafted by Engels, and entitled by him *The Principles of Communism*, the author rightly points out that the proletariat, as a class essentially different from the artisan class, emerges as a result of an industrial revolution. In Britain the industrial revolution took place in the second half of the 18th century, in France, Germany and other European countries no earlier than the mid 19th century, as a rule, following the bourgeois-democratic revolutions of 1848. In *The German Ideology*, i.e. one year earlier than *The Principles of Communism* was written, Marx and Engels assert that 'big industry created a class, which in all nations has the same interest and with which nationality is already dead; a class which is really rid of all the old world and at the same time stands pitted against it' (Marx & Engels, 1846, I, 'Most Extensive Division of Labour. Large-Scale Industry': 73).

Yet, even this, essentially fair, thesis contains a statement evidently contrary to fact about the loss of 'nationality' by the proletariat and thus of national awareness and national character. The actual trend of historical development is exaggerated by the founders of Marxism, who turn some observable facts into a *forecast* of the future situation of society and the working class. Thus, for example, they allege that the proletariat, which 'has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages (…) forms the majority of all members of society', and from it 'emanates the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution, the communist consciousness' (Marx & Engels, 1846, I, 'Proletarian and Communism. The Necessity of the Communist Revolution').

If we take into consideration that not all wage-earners are proletarians, i.e. if we define the concept of a proletarian as hired labour in the system of material production, it becomes evident that in the mid 19th century proletarians did not make up a majority of the population in any country. Even in Britain, which became an industrial nation as a result of the industrial revolution, the proletariat did not make up a majority of its population. The proportion of proletarians was certainly growing in all capitalist countries, but concurrently there was a major section of non-proletarian employees who managed to a greater or lesser extent to withstand the process of proletarianization.

A distinctive feature of *early* Marxism is the intention to reduce quite a diversified stratification of society to two basic opposites: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This oversimplification of the actual structure of capitalist society was justified in political terms, since it promoted understanding by the proletarian masses of their vital interests and the need to fight an unrelenting battle to satisfy them.

Marx and Engels' idea about the proletariat's vital interests, judging by the above statement, reflects neither the actual status of the working class nor its vital interests. Communist consciousness, awareness of the need for a radical revolution, was far from the proletarian perception, which is clear from historical facts known to Marx and Engels. The first large-scale organized protest movement by the proletariat in Britain – Chartism – was fighting for a change in electoral rights and for civil liberties, in short, for democracy. Socialism, as preached by Robert Owen and his followers, failed to elicit a response among the Chartists, even though several of their leaders later converted to socialism.

The Marxist idea about the proletariat being a socialist (communist) class by its very nature is ambivalent: this belief is stated as if to describe the actual state of

things but it definitely fails to grasp hard facts. Still, the belief is not utterly groundless for it does reflect existing, just emerging realities. In the 1848 revolutions the most advanced, class-conscious proletarians were already setting forth socialist demands, waging an armed struggle to establish workers' power. This struggle was doomed to defeat, which nonetheless failed to hold back the socialist objectives and aspirations of revolutionary workers. Yet the history of the labour movement in the 19th century unambiguously shows that the labour movement, even in its organized trade-unionist form, confines its targets mainly to economic demands: for higher wages, a shorter working day, occupational safety regulations and the like.

The followers of Marx and Engels, primarily the German Social-Democrats, reach the essential conclusion: communist ideas, as Karl Kautsky wrote, have to be brought into the labour movement *from without*, for on its own the movement will never become socialist (communist). Going along with Kautsky, Lenin came to the following categorical conclusion: the Marxist communist party alone is capable of overcoming the workers' trade-unionist consciousness which, according to Lenin, is *bourgeois*. Therefore, Kautsky and Lenin in fact rejected the Marxian tenet about the proletariat's socialist nature. Marx's thesis on the historical (socialist) mission of the proletariat was virtually replaced by the historical mission of a party that proclaimed its main objective to lie in winning state power with the help of the proletariat and in political education of that class. This essential revision of the party's programme, acting in the guise of Marxism, clearly revealed the ambivalence of Marxist theory. Belief in the proletariat's socialist (communist) nature was undoubtedly an erroneous illusion cherished by the founders of Marxism. But it was this illusion that actually implied the most resolute, consistent struggle for democracy, in contrast to the bourgeois democrats, who dissociated themselves from communism and the liberal movement as a whole.

A distinctive feature of Marxism, not only at its early stage, i.e. in the 1850s, but also in the subsequent years, was its founders' firm belief that a communist revolution and the communist reconstruction of society were to happen in the *nearest* future, as an *imperative*, a dire necessity for the very existence of society. It is most definitely expressed in *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. But in *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels also assert that the existence of communist ideas in society testifies to the presence of a real basis for the communist reconstruction of social relations: 'The existence of revolutionary ideas in a particular period presupposes the existence of a revolutionary class' (Marx & Engels, 1846, I, 'The Illusion of the Epoch. Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas').

Most likely Marx and Engels came to believe that revolutionary ideas *preceded* a revolutionary upheaval owing to their study of the prehistory and history of the great French Revolution, which had been ideologically prepared by the French Enlightenment. On the other hand, this belief, at least it seems so at first glance, logically follows from the materialistic understanding of history and its foundations as expounded in *The German Ideology*. However, a correlation between ideas (public consciousness in general) and social being, i.e. the real life of society, is never direct in character. Communist ideas were preached by Thomas Müntzer, though not a single class of contemporary German society was at all interested in abolishing private ownership of the means of production.

The authors of *The German Ideology* took such facts into due consideration. That is why they assert: 'as far as practical development is concerned, it is absolutely immaterial whether the idea of this revolution has been expressed a hundred times already' (Marx & Engels, 1846, I, 'The Illusion of the Epoch. Summary of the Materialist Conception of History').

Thus we have two mutually exclusive statements. No doubt in this case we are dealing with ambivalence. But both statements are true if we have in view different historical conditions. With this in mind it may be said that these mutually exclusive statements *complement* each other. Under these conditions the truth proves to be a union of opposites: it is neither unequivocal nor one-sided; it reflects the multi-faceted character of socio-historical development. The concept of communism substantiated by Marx and Engels also contains opposite, mutually exclusive definitions, i.e. it is ambivalent. In 1850 the founders of Marxism, together with two Blanquists and one radical Chartist, signed a constitution of the 'Universal Society of Revolutionary Communists' (it is unlikely that this society really existed at all). This declaration asserted that communism 'is to become the last form of humanity's social order' (Marx & Engels, 1850). There are no grounds for thinking that Marx and Engels, when signing this declaration, did not share this conviction and were guided by some tactical reasons. First of all, this kind of conciliatory tactic was utterly unacceptable to them. And secondly a similar thesis can be found in Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* written in 1844. As Marx wrote, communism 'is a real resolution of contradictions between man and nature and between human beings, a genuine resolution of the conflict between appearance and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, and between the individual and the genus. It is the solution of a historical riddle, and it is aware of being so' (Marx 1844, III, 'Private Property and Communism'). This understanding of communism as a final resolution of all essential contradictions intrinsic in the world historical process actually differs in no detail from the notion that communism 'is to become the last form of humanity's social order'. Yet it should be borne in mind that Marx's statement quoted above was made when his teaching was still in its *infancy*, i.e. it had not yet become a Marxist tenet corresponding to the materialistic understanding of history.

Should the reader agree with this thesis, then it may be deduced that world history has not only a beginning but also an *end*. This complies with Hegel's philosophical historical conception according to which 'absolute spirit' (humanity), owing to its development, will eventually carry out its 'ultimate aim'. Does this mean that further development of society will come to an end? Marx and Engels rejected this idea. They presumed that, upon the communist reconstruction of society, communist society would go on to develop. In his booklet *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Engels formulated this belief in the most clear-cut form: 'Just as knowledge is unable to reach a complete conclusion in a perfect, ideal condition of humanity, so is history unable to do so; a perfect society, a perfect "state", are things which can only exist in imagination. On the contrary, all successive historical systems are only transitory stages in the endless course of development of human society from the lower to the higher' (Engels, 1886: 'Hegel'). But in this case the communist order cannot be viewed as 'the last form of humanity's social order'. Yet we fail to



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find such a conclusion, even in implicit form, in classical Marxist works. The question as to what is to follow after communism is in principle incompatible with the communist doctrine of Marx and Engels.

So communism is understood by the founders of Marxism as the future post-capitalist society. Moreover, as mentioned above, they have in view not the remote future, which defies all prediction, but the very near future, humanity's historical tomorrow. But perhaps we can find another, essentially different conception of communism in the works of Marx and Engels? We come across it in the same *German Ideology*: 'Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things' (Marx & Engels, 1846, I, 'Private Property and Communism'). One might think that the authors of *The German Ideology* have in view a large-scale communist movement of revolutionaries attacking a capitalist fortress (though hardly *already* abolishing it). But as a matter of fact, in 1846 and in their lifetime, there was no large-scale revolutionary communist movement at all.

Of course it is possible to interpret this thesis in the sense that the chief point is in what communism *must be* in reality. But in this case its formulation is not quite correct. However, it should be noted that the same definition of communism is given not only in this early work of Marx and Engels. In 1860, in his article 'Herr Vogt', Marx stresses that 'the issue involves not the realization of a certain utopian system but conscious participation in the currently unfolding historical process aimed at the revolutionary transformation of society'. But this article fails to specify the kind of revolutionary transformation of social relations and in which country precisely it was going on.

Hence we have two opposing, mutually incompatible definitions of communism. Even so these contrary definitions complement and enrich each other. The ambivalence of the Marxist definition of communism may perplex the unsophisticated reader. But a person thinking dialectically will discern in this contradiction a required link between the future and the present, between the proletariat's real existing liberation struggle and its future trends.

*Manifesto of the Communist Party* is the first programmatic work written by the founders of Marxism, which not immediately but about two decades after its publication became known in the labour and especially the social-democratic movement, initiated by the foundation of the Social-Democratic Party in Germany. It is indeed a great work, even if it contains erroneous ideas about a fatal crisis of the capitalist system and the pressing need for a forced revolution for the communist reconstitution of bourgeois society. The paramount theoretical importance of the *Manifesto* is primarily due to the fact that it reveals the regular transformation of human history dating from the appearance of homo sapiens in a *world history* characterized essentially by the rise of a world market, the internationalization of production, the expansion of economic and cultural relations between nations which in feudal times lived separately or at war with their neighbours.

Late in the 20th century the concept of *globalization* was introduced into scholarly circulation, and promptly became widely used in colloquial language. But it was by no means immediately that scholars of the world historical process of economic and cultural globalization came to discover the absolute truth that this process, admittedly

at its early stages, had been thoroughly analysed by Marx and Engels, who described it as *internationalization* of production, inseparably linked with the *capitalist* transformation of feudal society with its predominantly stagnant production and consumption. As early as in *The German Ideology* its authors point out that the bourgeoisie 'produced world history for the first time, insofar as it made all civilized nations and every individual member of them dependent for the satisfaction of their wants on the whole world, thus destroying the former natural exclusiveness of separate nations' (Marx & Engels, 1846, I, 'The Real Basis of Ideology. The Rise of Manufacturing'). The *Manifesto* contains systematic development of this concept. The great geographical discoveries (in particular, the discovery of America and the rounding of the Cape) made it possible to develop economic and cultural relations between all parts of our planet, whereas in the Middle Ages notions about world population hardly ever went beyond the confines of Europe. The industrial revolution, even though in the 18th century it was taking place in Britain alone, broke down the feudal social order. It continually expanded the sphere of material production and consumption, which directly promoted the establishment of a world market, appearing as the first historical form of cultural exchanges between nations. As stressed in the *Manifesto*, the world market 'has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its time, reacted on the extension of industry; and in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation, railways extended, in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed,' which, 'wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations' (Marx & Engels, 1848, 'Bourgeois and Proletarians'). When developing this thesis, Marx and Engels point to the rise of new industries that no longer transform indigenous raw materials, but raw materials drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed not only at home but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by national products, there arise new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climates. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, there comes intercourse in every direction and universal interdependence of nations. Though this proposition was formulated more than 150 years ago, it sounds *highly topical today* because nowadays the social and economic trends outlined by Marx and Engels have achieved all-round development and turned into the ruling regularities.

According to the founders of Marxism, historically the bourgeoisie has played a most revolutionary part. However, they implied not the bourgeoisie of the mid 19th century but that of the preceding era. The *Manifesto* stresses that 'the bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarcely one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together' *(ibid.)*. Marx and Engels point to the multifarious forms of nature's forces subjected by humankind, progress in machinery construction, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, and clearing of 'whole continents' for cultivation. Yet all these achievements belong, in the authors' view, to the past since modern bourgeois relations of production *fetter* the development of productive forces instead of promoting their progress in every possible way. The bourgeoisie, which acted as a revolutionary force in the past, turned into a conservative class: 'For many a decade past the history of industry and commerce is but the history of the

revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production, against the property relations that are the conditions for the existence of the bourgeoisie and its rule. It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodic return put the existence of the entire bourgeois society on its trial, each time more threateningly' *(ibid.)*. As can be easily seen, the issue concerns crises of overproduction when supply of products far exceeds solvent demand. This results in partial or complete suspension of production, the ruin of many, particularly small and medium entrepreneurs, mass unemployment and attendant hunger, despite the unprecedented overproduction of food products. A part of these products is simply destroyed by the capitalists themselves because selling them is unfeasible, while storing them is too costly.

In *Capital* Marx systematized his theory of overproduction crises, proving that these crises inevitably result from capitalist production developing anarchically; it is growing at a rapid rate because solvent demand exceeds supply. But as a result of this feverish growth of production, supply increasingly starts to exceed solvent demand, which causes overproduction and a large number of products remain unsold. This inevitably leads to economic crisis with all its consequences, which may last for a year and in some cases even longer. It is followed by a rise in production when demand exceeds supply, as a result of which production starts all over again to grow at feverish rates.

The authors of the Communist *Manifesto* had as yet no clear scientific conception of economic crises and their *transient* character. Like the Swiss economist Jean Sismondi, a petty bourgeois critic of capitalism, they interpreted overproduction and economic crisis as a direct manifestation of the crisis and economic insolvency of the capitalist system and as a quite apparent contradiction between the productive forces that have developed within capitalism and the restricted private-ownership relations of production. But in contrast to Sismondi, who saw the only possible way out of this pseudo-crisis of the capitalist system in a return to pre-capitalist production by independent small manufacturers, Marx and Engels, rejecting this retrograde utopian view of post-capitalist society, pointed to the historically, economically and politically justified necessity for socialization of the means of production and transformation of producers, working people (first of all, proletarians), into a collective owner of all production capacities. Hence, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* proclaims and, as it seems at first glance, theoretically substantiates the objective necessity, as its authors believe, for the communist reconstruction of bourgeois society by way of a forcible revolution, with a view to overthrowing the ruling class of capitalists and placing the proletariat at the helm of state power.

It is absolutely clear to the present-day reader that at the time of Marx and Engels there was no objective necessity for a transition to a post-capitalist society and that the idea of a proletarian (communist) revolution was just utopian. But the authors of *The Communist Manifesto* were convinced that the impending bourgeois democratic revolution in several European countries would be merely an episode on the way to the proletariat's social revolution. They assert that, though the German states were still at the stage of manufacturing capitalism, the communist revolution will immediately follow its opposite, that is, a bourgeois revolution: 'The bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolu-

tion' (Marx & Engels, 1848, 'Position of the Communists in Relation to the various Existing Opposition Parties'). This proposition logically ensues from the basic thesis in characterizing capitalism: an apparent contradiction between productive forces and (capitalist) relations of production. Economic crises, according to the *Manifesto*, are an inevitable result of this crucial contradiction. That is why overproduction crises are characterized as a crisis of the entire capitalist system, pointing to its unavoidable collapse in the very near future.

The logic of this reasoning is clear. And the point is not only in Marx and Engels having as yet no command of the requisite economic knowledge in order to grasp the true nature of overproduction crises and give the right answer to the following question: is there a real conflict between the productive forces that have developed within capitalism and the restricted capitalist social relations of production? The main point is that, along with the above-mentioned reasoning about a fatal crisis of the capitalist system of production, *The Communist Manifesto* contains some absolutely contrary *statements*. For example: 'The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production' (Marx & Engels, 1848, 'Bourgeois and Proletarians'). Let us ponder this statement. After everything that had already been said in the *Manifesto*, it looks entirely irrelevant. However, it is not a logical deduction but the articulation of a genuinely existing process. As Marx and Engels state, the bourgeoisie *constantly* revolutionizes the instruments of production. Moreover, it also constantly revolutionizes *the relations of production*, i.e. it changes them in accordance with development of productive forces. Then what kind of contradiction can exist between productive forces and relations of production? As a matter of fact, as is seen from the above quotation, such a contradiction is non-existent. Of course it may be presupposed that Marx and Engels are mistaken in their reasoning about the bourgeoisie constantly revolutionizing production. This statement is utterly out of place in the *Manifesto*; it just has to be taken out of the given context as something extraneous. But the genius of its authors is due precisely to the fact that, not being afraid of a contradiction, they tell *the truth* about the real state of things under capitalism, even though this truth refutes the death sentence they have already passed on capitalism.

But if there is no contradiction fatal for capitalism between productive forces and relations of production, why are Marx and Engels so insistent about the *urgent* need for a proletarian revolution? The answer is provided by stating the following fact: the proletariat's conditions of existence are unbearable because of pitiless exploitation and miserable wages. Under feudalism, as Marx and Engels point out, the ruling class exploiting peasants nonetheless ensured certain conditions under which they could at least continue their servile existence. But it is not so in capitalist society where formally free labourers, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sink deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of their own class. They become paupers, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth. It becomes evident that the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to remain the ruling class. It is unfit to rule because it is incompetent at ensuring an existence for its slaves within their slavery. Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, i.e. its existence is no longer compatible with society.

The reader unfamiliar with the real state of bourgeois society in the first half of the

19th century may think that Marx and Engels exaggerate the appalling conditions of proletarians' lives on the eve of the bourgeois revolutions of 1848. But it is impossible to get away from the facts. For example, workers in Lyon received merely 18 sous for their 18-hour working day at a factory manufacturing silk fabrics. In Germany the working day also lasted 18 hours, while wages were often paid in coupons for buying commodities in the factory owner's shop, and this bare subsistence wage paid to workers led to their premature death. Factories exploited not only adults but even six- or seven-year-old children. According to official statistics, every fourth inhabitant of Cologne in 1847 had to live on charity for the needy (Kuczynski, 1947: 34, 44).

In 1847 the German liberal Carl Biedermann published his lectures on socialism and social questions in which he stated that 'the first and immediate task of socialism' was to prevent proletarians and their poverty from multiplying. As a radical measure to solve this task, and drawing on Malthus's findings, he proposed to outlaw marriages at an early age (Biedermann, 1847: 71).

Another German liberal, Julius Berends (1847: 17, 23), stated that 'the way to eliminate poverty' lay in setting up various workers' associations and mutual-aid unions, as well as in 'labour organization' on the initiative of public authorities: 'labour organization is a demand that cannot be avoided today'.

In April 1847, when an economic crisis and corn failure led to widespread famine, the workers and their wives in Berlin went into direct action, holding out for four days against potato speculators and bakers who cheated customers over weights. About one hundred participants in this 'potato war', as contemporaries called it, were brought to trial.

The founders of Marxism resolutely rejected liberal projects and half-measures that could only create illusions among the proletarians and make them turn away from stubborn struggle against the capitalist exploiters. The Communist *Manifesto* substantiates the necessity for a determined revolution against the capitalists' tyranny. But Marx and Engels were well aware that the impending revolution could be only a bourgeois one, i.e. it would replace feudal lords with the class of capitalists. That is why they proclaimed the need for an *uninterrupted* revolution, which was not to cease after the bourgeoisie came to power but was to continue until the proletariat took control of the government.

The idea of an uninterrupted revolution was first put forward by Jean-Paul Marat, the outstanding Jacobin French revolutionary. Marat understood that the whole course of the revolution would, at least initially, bring the bourgeoisie into power. But in order to prevent this outcome and achieve the workers' conquest of government, the revolution must of necessity be continued. Marx and Engels grasped this idea and, during the bourgeois revolutions of 1848, they substantiated the need to *continue* the revolution after the bourgeoisie came to power. But like Marat they were mistaken because they failed as yet to comprehend and take into consideration that, under the existing social and economic conditions, there was no other way but to establish the capitalist mode of production. No earlier than September 1850 the founders of Marxism came to recognize their mistake in counting on an uninterrupted revolution and the incompatibility of this essentially subjective, voluntaristic view with the materialistic understanding of history. Therefore they thought it their

duty to oppose those of their associates who, despite the absence of a revolutionary situation, went on to advocate uninterrupted revolution. One of these was Karl Schapper who claimed: 'The point is that we should start ourselves to cut off their heads or they will be cutting off ours. In France it is going to be the workers' turn and thus *ours* in Germany … I do not share the opinion that in Germany the bourgeois will come to power, and on this point I am an enthusiastic fanatic.' In his answer to Schapper, Marx declared: 'As for enthusiasm, it does not take so much of it to belong to a party which, as you believe, is just about to come to power. I have always objected to the proletariat's ephemeral views. We are dedicated to the party that, fortunately for us, cannot yet come to power … Our party can come to power only when the conditions allowed us to put *its* views into effect.'

Lenin knew perfectly well that Marx had rejected the idea of an uninterrupted revolution as a mistake which was in danger of sapping the liberation movement of the working class. Nevertheless, as early as 1905, he stressed transition to a socialist revolution. In formulating this voluntaristic precept, he wrote: 'from the democratic revolution we shall at once, and precisely in accordance with the measure of our strength, the strength of the class-conscious and organized proletariat, begin to pass to the socialist revolution. We stand for uninterrupted revolution' (Lenin, 1905).

The 1905 revolution was suppressed by tsarism and transition to a socialist revolution proved unworkable. But in 1917 the February revolution overthrew autocracy and proclaimed the establishment of a democratic republic whose concrete forms were to be decreed by the constituent assembly elected by universal, egalitarian and secret ballot. Lenin wrote that, thanks to the February revolution, Russia had become the freest country in the world. But this freedom did not suit Lenin, who came to realize that the Bolsheviks would become the minority in the constituent assembly because the peasants supported the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. To prevent transition of state power to this party, whose leaders already headed the provisional government, Lenin convinced the leadership of his own party of the need for an armed uprising aimed at overthrowing the provisional government and establishing 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. The uprising organized by the Bolsheviks in Petrograd was successful. The government passed into the hands of Lenin's party. The constituent assembly, which had just started work on the fundamental constitutional questions, was disbanded. All of this came to be known as the great October Revolution. Some 20th century thinkers, who are far from being Marxists, acclaim the October revolution as a really great event. For instance, according to James Billington, in contrast to thinkers living in the 19th century who viewed a key problem as defining their attitude to the French revolution, thinkers today see a central problem as defining their attitude to the Russian revolution (Billington, 1966: 452). The philosopher notes the following *fact*: the October revolution created high humanistic expectations. But those expectations were dispelled by the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party, Stalinist terrorism and eventually by the collapse of 'true socialism' in the USSR and other European countries.

The country that, after the February revolution, became the freest country in the world turned into a non-free country controlled by a dictator. 'Theoretically' justifying this transformation, Lenin asserted: 'as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom the state as such ceases to exist' (Lenin, 1918, ch. 5, 'The Economic Basis

of the Withering Away of the State'). Developing this overtly untenable, paradoxical thesis, Lenin complemented it with a no less paradoxical and untenable claim: 'freedom' and 'democracy' are commonly viewed as identical concepts and often used as synonyms. In actual fact, democracy excludes freedom. According to Lenin it is in effect democracy and dictatorship that are identical. As they say, comment is superfluous.

Disbanding the constituent assembly, banning the Menshevik and Constitutional Democratic parties, ousting the left socialist-revolutionaries with whom the Bolsheviks had formed a joint government, introducing censorship, establishing the All-Russian Special Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage, notorious for its common practice of extrajudicial reprisals, including shooting, against all real and imaginary opponents of the new government, and persecuting dissenters – all these factors triggered a civil war, with its losses approximating those suffered by the Russian troops in the First World War.

The policy of 'barrack communism', proclaimed by Lenin as the *communist* reconstruction of society, precipitated an acute political and economic crisis. The only way to ride out this crisis was to 'permit' limited development of capitalism and free trade, i.e. to restore what had been banned and liquidated during the first year of the Bolshevik government as the accursed legacy of the past. The New Economic Policy (NEP) declared by Lenin was treated as a highroad to socialism. Particular hopes were thus pinned on 'state capitalism', in other words foreign concessions. But capitalists from European countries and the USA refused to invest in the Soviet economy. As Lenin (1922) believed, there was nothing left to do but restructure the work of nationalized enterprises: 'the socialised state enterprises are being put on what is called a profit basis, i.e., they are being reorganised on commercial lines'. It is noteworthy (as a most significant fact) that a rational and profitable mode of economic activity is actually viewed by Lenin as *capitalistic*.

Thus the paradoxical and ambivalent character of the Bolshevist revolution was due to the fact that it proved incapable of doing away with capitalist exploitation once and for all. Soviet government came to supersede the capitalist class. Of course this fact was never made public, but the working class felt it all the time in its daily life.

In the course of more than 70 years Soviet working people, toiling at breaking point, overcoming 'temporary difficulties' that turned into permanent hardships, and making numerous sacrifices, carried through the industrialization of a vast country, set up a powerful defence industry, trained highly qualified specialists in all fields of the national economy and culture and, despite the unprecedented and murderous terror unleashed by Stalin and his aides that cost the lives of nearly all senior commanders of the Red Army, defeated Hitler's hordes, saved their motherland, which the Nazi invaders planned to annihilate as a state, and liberated the European countries from Nazi enslavement. And following the great victory over the enemy the Soviet people had for several years to restore this country and its ruined towns, factories and railways. Yet, notwithstanding all the heroic feats of the Soviet peoples in world history, Stalin's clique went on with their criminal reprisals in the postwar years. Quite a few heroes of the great patriotic war, even a number of field marshals, fell victim to Stalinism, which everywhere suspected a threat to its existence.

The Soviet economy continued to undergo extensive development in the postwar years while the countries of 'dying' (according to Lenin) capitalism launched into a *scientific and technological revolution*, radically transforming material production and essentially changing all social relations.

This history of the USSR, full of extreme hardships and trials, came to a logical end with the Soviet people's *renunciation* of socialism (on the model shaped by Lenin and Stalin), which proved incapable of carrying out a thorough technological revolution and raising labour productivity and national consumption up to the level attained by the capitalist countries.

So it is not only the theory of Marxism but also the practice of its realization that turned out to be ambivalent. But the ambivalence of 'Leninism-Stalinism' has in fact almost nothing in common with ambivalence of the teaching of Marx and Engels, which the Bolshevik party used as a guideline more in word than in deed. Nevertheless, critical analysis of the ambivalent character of both Marxism and also 'Marxism-Leninism' allows us to comprehend not only the errors made in both theory and practice, but also the true outstanding significance of the teachings that to a great extent determined the main features of the 20th century.

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## Notes

1. All quotations from Marx, Engels and Lenin are borrowed from the Marxists Internet Archive Library (http://www.marxists.org/archive/), reproducing the MCEW and LCW standard editions. We considered it to be easier for scholars to refer to this web-available edition, rather than to the original hard copy.

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