

An  
Elementary Course  
in  
PHILOSOPHY

by  
**Georges Politzer**

AN ELEMENTARY COURSE IN PHILOSOPHY: POLITZER

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IN PHILOSOPHY

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By GEORGE POLITZER

*(Translated by Dr. G. P. O'Day, Melbourne)*



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June, 1950

## FOREWORD

J. D. BLAKE

The subject of this book has the deepest significance for all Communists and militant workers.

When the word "philosophy" is mentioned, workers often think the subject referred to is abstract, remote, and above their heads; and that in any case it is a subject too difficult for them to master.

The elementary course in philosophy contained in this book, for which we are indebted to the Communist Party of France, will prove to our advanced Australian workers that although there are difficulties, these need not prevent any worker from studying and mastering the theoretical principles of Marxism.

Dialectical and historical materialism constitute the world outlook of the Communist Party.

Our advanced workers will be able to see their way ahead and fight out the issues right through to the establishment of working class power only to the extent that they master these theoretical principles of Marxism and learn to apply these principles in the daily struggle.

Naturally, this elementary course is only a beginning, but without doubt it is a very good beginning.

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M. Politzer, a leading propagandist of the French Communist Party, was murdered by the German fascists during the occupation of France. This book was prepared by his students from notes of lectures given by him before the war.

The following letter, written by Gabriel Peri during his last moments, nobly expresses the outlook of M. Politzer, who met a similar fate:—

“The prison chaplain has just informed me that I am going to be shot in a few moments as a hostage. I beg you to apply to the Cherche-Midi authorities for my belongings. Perhaps some of my papers will serve my memory.

“Let my friends know that I have remained faithful to the ideal I have held all my life. Let my countrymen know that I die so that France may live.

“I have examined my conscience for the last time. I have no regrets. That is what I should like you to tell everyone; if I had my life over again I would follow the same road.

“Tonight I firmly believe that my dear Paul Vaillant-Couturier was right when he said that Communism was the regeneration of the world and that it would prepare the way for the radiant dawn. Without doubt it is because Marcel Cachin was my good teacher that I face death with fortitude.

“Adieu! And long live France!

GABRIEL.”

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PART I.

PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

## INTRODUCTION

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1. Why should we study Philosophy?
2. Is the study of Philosophy difficult?
3. What is Philosophy?
4. What is Materialist Philosophy?
5. What are the relations between Materialism and Marxism?
6. Campaigns by the bourgeoisie against Marxism.

### 1. Why should we study Philosophy?

We propose, in the course of this work, to present and explain the elementary principles of Materialist Philosophy. Why? Because Marxism is intimately related to a philosophy and a method: those of Dialectical Materialism. This philosophy and this method must therefore be studied in order to understand Marxism well, to refute the arguments drawn from bourgeois theories, and so be able to carry on an effective political struggle. In fact, Lenin said: "Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement." That means, first of all: Theory must be united to Practice.

*What is practice?* It is the act of realisation. For example, industry and agriculture realise (that is to

say, they bring into reality) certain theories (chemical, physical or biological theories).

*What is theory?* It is the *knowledge* of things that we want to realise. One can be merely practical, but then one realises by routine. One can be merely theoretical, but then what one conceives is often incapable of realisation. There must therefore be connection between theory and practice. The whole question is to know what this theory must be and what must be its connection with practice.

We consider that the militant worker must possess a method of analysis and of correct reasoning in order to be able to carry out correct revolutionary action. He needs a method that is not a dogma supplying ready-made solutions, but one which takes account of facts and circumstances which are never the same, a method which never separates theory from practice, reasoning from life. Now, this method is to be found in the philosophy, Dialectical Materialism, which we propose to explain.

## 2. Is the study of Philosophy difficult?

It is generally thought that the study of Philosophy is full of difficulties for the workers, requiring special knowledge. It must be confessed that the way in which bourgeois manuals are composed is well suited to confirm the workers in this idea, and can only repel them.

We would not dream of denying the difficulties of study in general and particularly that of Philosophy. However, these difficulties are perfectly surmountable; they arise mostly from the fact that we are dealing with things that are new to many of our readers.

At the beginning, for the sake of precision, we will review certain definitions of words distorted in current usage.

## 3. What is Philosophy?

Commonly, a philosopher is understood to be either one who lives in the clouds, or one who looks on the good side and does not make a fuss. Now, quite the contrary, the philosopher is one who wants to give precise answers to certain questions, and if one remembers that Philosophy wants to give an explanation of the problems of the Universe (where does the world come from? Where are we going? etc.), one sees, in consequence, that the philosopher busies himself with many things and contrary to what is said, he makes a great deal of fuss.

We will say, then, in order to define Philosophy, that it wants to explain Nature, the Universe, that it is *the study of the most general problems*. The less general problems are studied by the sciences. Thus Philosophy is an extension of the sciences.

We interpolate immediately that Marxist philosophy furnishes a solution to all problems, and that this solution springs from what we call "Materialism."

## 4. What is Materialist Philosophy?

Here again there exists a confusion which we must immediately mention; commonly by materialist is meant one who thinks of nothing but enjoying material pleasures. Playing on the word materialism, which contains the word matter, people have come to give it a quite false meaning. While studying materialism, in the scientific sense of the word, we will give it back its true meaning; and we will see that being materialist prevents no one having an ideal and fighting for its triumph.

We have already said that Philosophy desires to give an explanation of the most general problems of

the world. However, in the course of history, these explanations have not always been the same.

The first men sought indeed to explain nature, the world, but they could not succeed. In fact, what enables the world and the phenomena that surround us to be explained, is the Sciences; but the discoveries that have given progress to the sciences are very recent.

So the ignorance of the first men was an obstacle to their seekings. That is why, in the course of history, because of this ignorance, we see arising religions which also desire to explain the world, but by supernatural forces. There you have an anti-scientific explanation. Still, as little by little, in the course of centuries, science develops, men attempt to explain the world by material facts arising from scientific experiments and it is from this desire to explain things by the sciences, that Materialist Philosophy is born.

In the succeeding pages, we are going to study the question, "What is Materialism?"; but henceforward we must remember that *materialism is nothing else than the scientific explanation of the universe.*

While studying the history of Materialist Philosophy, we will see how bitter and difficult the struggle against ignorance has been. Besides, it must be observed that in our days this fight has not yet ended, since materialism and ignorance continue to exist side by side.

It was in the course of this battle that Marx and Engels intervened. Understanding the importance of the great discoveries of the 19th century, they caused Materialist Philosophy to make enormous advances in the scientific explanation of the universe. Thus dialectical materialism was born. Next, they were the first to understand that the laws which rule the world give also the explanation of the march of society; thus, they formulated the celebrated theory of Historical Materialism.

We propose in this work to study, first Materialism, next Dialectical Materialism, and, finally, Historical Materialism. At the moment, however, we want to establish the relations between Materialism and Marxism.

## 5. What are the relations between Materialism and Marxism?

We can summarise them in the following manner:—

1. The Philosophy of Materialism constitutes the base of Marxism.

2. This Materialist Philosophy which desires to give a scientific explanation of the world's problems, advances in the course of history at the same time as the Sciences; consequently, Marxism has sprung from the Sciences, is based on them and evolves with them.

3. Before Marx and Engels, there were at several times and in varying forms, materialist philosophies. In the 19th century, however, with the sciences making a great stride forward, Marx and Engels shaped Materialism anew, basing themselves on the modern sciences, and gave us *modern* materialism, which is called Dialectical Materialism, and constitutes the foundation of Marxism.

By these explanations, we see that, contrary to what people say, the Philosophy of Materialism has a history. This history is intimately bound up with the history of the sciences. Marxism based on materialism did not come from the brain of one man alone. It is the continuation, the fulfilment of ancient materialism, which was already very advanced with Diderot. Marxism is the blossoming of the materialism developed by the encyclopedists of the 18th century, enriched by

the great discoveries of the 19th century. Marxism is a living theory. In order to show immediately how it envisages problems, we are going to take an example that everyone knows; the problem of the class struggle.

What do people think on this question? Some think that defence of their bread does away with the need for political struggle. Others think that street fighting is sufficient, and deny the necessity of organisation. Yet again, others assert that political struggle only can provide a solution to this question.

For the Marxist, the class struggle comprises:

- (a) The economic struggle.
- (b) The political struggle.
- (c) The ideological struggle.

The problem must therefore be posed *simultaneously* on these three grounds.

(a) One cannot fight for bread (economic struggle) without fighting for peace (political struggle) and without defending liberty (ideological struggle).

(b) The same holds with the political struggle, which since Marx has become a veritable science; one is obliged to take account of both the economic position and the ideological trends.

(c) As to the ideological struggle which takes the form of propaganda, one must take into account, if it is going to be effective, the economic and political situation.

We see, then, that all these problems are closely bound together, and so one cannot take a decision on any aspect whatever of this great problem—the class struggle—without taking into consideration each aspect of the problem and the problem as a whole.

Therefore, it is he who is able to wage the battle on all fields who will give the best leadership to the movement.

That is how a Marxist understands the problem of class struggle.

Now, in the ideological struggle that we have to engage in every day, we find facing us problems difficult to solve: The immortality of the soul, the existence of God, the origin of the world, etc.

It is Dialectical Materialism that will give us a method of reasoning, that will permit us to solve all these problems and also indeed to unmask all the campaigns of falsification of Marxism which pretend to complete and refashion it.

## 6. Campaigns by the bourgeoisie against Marxism

These efforts at falsification rest on very diverse foundations. Some seek to array against Marxism the socialist authors of the pre-Marxist period (before Marx). Thus one very often sees the "Utopians" used against Marx. Others utilise Proudhon; still others base themselves on the revisionists of the pre-1914 period, who were refuted in masterly fashion by Lenin. But what must above all be emphasised is the campaign of silence that the bourgeoisie conducts against Marxism. They have in particular done everything possible to prevent Materialist Philosophy in its Marxist form being known. Especially striking in this regard is the whole of philosophic teaching as it is given in France.

In the secondary schools, philosophy is taught. But one can complete all the courses without ever learning that there exists a Materialist Philosophy elaborated by Marx and Engels. When, in the manuals of Philosophy, Materialism is spoken of (for it has to be spoken of), it is always a matter of Marxism and of materialism in a separated way. Marxism is presented,

in general, solely as a political doctrine and when Historical Materialism is mentioned, the philosophy of materialism is not spoken of in this connection; finally the whole of Dialectical Materialism is ignored.

This situation exists not only in the schools and colleges, it is exactly the same in the universities. The most characteristic fact is that in France, one may be a specialist in philosophy, armed with highest diplomas of the French universities, without knowing that Marxism has a philosophy, which is materialism, and without knowing that traditional materialism has a modern form which is Marxism, i.e., Dialectical Materialism.

We therefore will demonstrate that Marxism implies a general conception not merely of society, but also of the universe itself. It is then useless, contrary to what certain people pretend, to regret that the great defect of Marxism is its lack of philosophy, and to want, like certain theorists of the Labor movement, to undertake a research for the philosophy that Marxism lacks.

Nevertheless, despite this campaign of silence, despite all the falsifications and precautions taken by the ruling classes, Marxism and its philosophy are beginning to be more and more widely known.

## CHAPTER I. THE BASIC PROBLEM OF PHILOSOPHY

1. How should we begin the Study of Philosophy?
2. Two modes of explaining the World.
3. Matter and Spirit.
4. What is Matter? What is Spirit?
5. The Question or Basic Problem of Philosophy.
6. Idealism or Materialism.

### 1. How should we begin the study of Philosophy?

In the introduction we said on several occasions that the Philosophy of Dialectical Materialism was the basis of Marxism.

Our purpose is to study this philosophy; however, to do this, we must pass through several stages. When we speak of Dialectical Materialism, we have before us two words: *materialism* and *dialectical*, which means that materialism *is* dialectical. We know that materialism existed before Marx and Engels, but that they, with the help of the discoveries of the nineteenth century, transformed this materialism and created Dialectical Materialism.

Later on we will examine the meaning of the word, "dialectical," which designates the modern form of materialism. However, since there were materialist

philosophers before Marx and Engels (for example, Diderot in the eighteenth century), and since there are points that are common to all materialists, we must study the *history* of materialism before tackling Dialectical Materialism. Equally, we must understand what are the concepts that people set up in opposition to Materialism.

## 2. Two modes of explaining the World

We have seen that philosophy is the "study of the most general problems" and that its object is to explain the world, nature and man.

If we open a manual of bourgeois philosophy we are bewildered by the multitude of different philosophies that we find there. They are designated by numerous more or less complex words ending in "ism," e.g., Criticism, Evolutionism, Intellectualism, etc. And this multitude creates confusion. Besides, the bourgeoisie have done nothing to clarify the situation; but indeed, exactly the contrary. However, we must at once sort out all these systems, and distinguish two great currents, two concepts, that are in sharp opposition.

- (a) The scientific concept of the world.
- (b) The non-scientific concept of the world.

## 3. Matter and Spirit

When philosophers try to explain the world, nature and man, in a word, all the things that surround us, they at once find themselves called on to make distinctions. We ourselves observe that there are things, objects, that are material, that we see and touch. Then there are other things, that we do not see, and that we cannot touch, nor measure, like our ideas.

So we class things thus—on the one hand, things that are material, on the other, those that are not material and which belong to the domain of intelligence, of thought and of ideas.

Thus it is that philosophers found themselves in the presence of Matter and Intelligence (or spirit).

## 4. What is Matter? What is Spirit?

We have just seen, in a general way, how people have been led to classify things according to whether they are matter or spirit. However, we must specify that the distinction is made in different forms and in different words.

Thus it is that instead of talking of spirit, we also speak of Thought, of our Ideas, of our Consciousness, of the Soul, just as when we speak of Nature, of the World, of the Earth, of Being, it is with matter that we are concerned.

Engels, in his book *Ludwig Feuerbach*, speaks of Being and Thought. Being is matter, Thought is spirit.

In order to define Thought or Spirit, and Being or Matter, we will say: Thought is the idea of things that we fashion for ourselves; some of our ideas come to us ordinarily from our sensations and correspond to material objects; other ideas, such as those of God, of Philosophy, of the Infinite, of Thought itself do not correspond to material objects.

The essential thing that we must grasp here is that we have ideas, thoughts and sentiments *because* we see, because of our sensations.

Matter or Being is what our sensations and perceptions show us and present to us. Namely, in a general way, all that surrounds us: what is called "the outer world." For example, my sheet of paper

is white. *Knowing* that it is white, is an idea, and it is my senses that give me that idea. The paper itself is matter.

That is why, when philosophers speak of the relations between Being and Thought, or between Spirit and Matter, or between Consciousness and the Brain, etc., it all involves the same question—namely, which is the most important, which is dominant, and finally, which came first? Matter or Spirit, Being or Thought? That is what is termed:—

### 5. The Question or Basic Problem of Philosophy

Every one of us has wondered what becomes of us after death, whence comes the world, how was the earth formed . . . And it is difficult for us to admit that *something* has always existed. There is a tendency to think that at a certain time there existed nothing. That is why it is easier to believe what religion teaches, "The Spirit hovered above the Darkness . . . then came Matter." In the same way we wonder *where* are our thoughts and thus is posed for us the problem of the relations between Spirit and Matter, between the Brain and Thought. Besides, there are many other ways of posing the question. For example, what are the relations between Will and Power? Will, here, means Spirit, Thought; and Power is that which is possible—that which exists, is Being, Matter. We also often meet the question of the relations between "Social Consciousness" and "Social Existence."

The fundamental question of philosophy, then, presents itself under different aspects, and one sees how important it is to always recognise the manner in which this problem of the relations between Matter and Spirit

is posed, for we know that there can be only two answers to this question:—

- (a) A scientific answer.
- (b) An unscientific answer.

### 6. Idealism or Materialism

Thus it is that philosophers have been led to take their stand on this important question.

Primitive men, who were entirely ignorant, with no real knowledge of the world or of themselves, attributed all that surprised them to supernatural beings. In their imagination, stimulated by dreams in which they saw their friends and themselves as living, they came to the conclusion that everyone had a double existence. Disturbed by the idea of this "double," they came to imagine that their thoughts and sensations were not activities of their "bodies, but of a distinct soul which inhabits the body and leaves it at death" (Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*). Hence was born the idea of the immortality of the soul and of a possible life of the spirit outside matter.

It took men very many centuries to work out the problem in that way. In reality, it is only since the time of Greek philosophy (and in particular, since Plato, about twenty-five centuries ago) that they clearly opposed matter to spirit.

No doubt they had for a long time imagined that man continued to live after death in the form of a "soul," but they pictured this soul as a kind of light, transparent body, not in the form of pure thought.

So they used to believe in god, in beings more powerful than man, but they pictured them in the shape of animals or men—that is, as material bodies. It was only much later that Souls and Gods (and then

the one God who has replaced the gods) came to be conceived as Spirits with no material admixture.

Then the idea came that there are really Spirits who have a quite specific life, completely independent of that of the body, and who have no need of a body for their existence.

Consequently this question was posed in a more exact way in relation to religion, as follows:

"Did God create the world, or has the world been in existence eternally? The answers which the philosophers gave to this question split them into two great camps." (Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*.)

Those who, adopting the non-scientific explanation, admitted the creation of the world by God; that is to say who asserted that Spirit had created Matter, these formed the camp of Idealism.

The others, those who sought to give a scientific explanation of the world, and who thought that Nature, Matter, was the principal element, belonged to the various schools of Materialism. At the beginning, these two expressions, Idealism and Materialism, meant nothing more than that.

Idealism and Materialism are, then, two opposite, contradictory answers to the fundamental problem of philosophy. Idealism is the non-scientific conception. Materialism is the scientific conception of the world.

Further on you will see the proofs of this affirmation, but we can say here and now that we can indeed observe from experience that there are bodies without thought, such as stones, metals, earth, but that the existence of thought without body is never observed.

To end this chapter with a conclusion that bears no trace of equivocation, we see that in reply to the question "How comes it that Man thinks?" there can

be only two answers, each entirely different and utterly opposed to the others:—

1. First answer: Man thinks because he has a soul.
2. Second answer: Man thinks because he has a brain.

According to the answer we give, we will be led to give different solutions to the problems arising from this question.

According to our answer, we are Materialists or Idealists.

## RECOMMENDED READING

*Feuerbach*, Engels—Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER II.

### IDEALISM

1. Moral Idealism and Philosophical Idealism.
2. Why should we study the Idealism of Berkeley?
3. The Idealism of Berkeley.
4. The results of "idealist" reasoning.
5. Idealist arguments.
  - (1) Spirit creates matter.
  - (2) The world does not exist outside of our thought.
  - (3) It is our ideas which create things.

#### 1. Moral Idealism and Philosophical Idealism

We have already exposed the confusion created by current language concerning Materialism. We meet the same confusion with regard to Idealism.

In fact, Moral Idealism and Philosophical Idealism must not be confounded.

Moral Idealism consists in devotion to a cause, to an ideal. The history of the international working class movement tells us that an incalculable number of revolutionaries, of Marxists, have devoted themselves even to the sacrifice of their lives for a moral ideal, and yet they were adversaries of that other idealism which is termed Philosophical Idealism.

#### *Philosophical Idealism:*

Philosophical Idealism is a doctrine the basis of which is the explanation of matter by the spirit.

It is the reasoning which answers the basic question of philosophy by saying, "It is Thought which is the principal element, the most important, the primary." And Idealism, in asserting the primary importance of Thought, affirms that it is Thought that produces Being, or, in other words, that "it is Spirit which produces Matter."

Such is the primary form of Idealism. It found its full development in the religions which assert that God, "pure spirit," was the creator of matter.

Religion, which claimed and still claims to be outside philosophical discussions, is, on the contrary, in reality the direct and logical representation of Idealist philosophy.

Now as Science intervened through the centuries, it became necessary to explain Matter, the world and things otherwise than solely by God. For since the sixteenth century, Science was beginning to explain the phenomena of Nature without taking God into account and without using the hypothesis of Creation.

The better to combat these scientific, materialist and atheist explanations, it then became necessary to push idealism a bit further and to *deny the very existence of Matter.*

At the beginning of the 18th century that was undertaken by an English bishop, Berkeley, who has been called the Father of Idealism.

#### 2. Why should we study the Idealism of Berkeley?

Clearly the goal of his philosophic system was to destroy Materialism, to attempt to demonstrate that

the material substance does not exist. He writes in the preface of his book *Dialogues of Hylas and Philonous*, as follows:—

"If these principles are accepted and regarded as true, it follows that Atheism and Scepticism are with one stroke completely felled, the obscure problems clarified, almost insoluble problems resolved and the men, who delight in paradoxes, brought back to commonsense."

Thus then, for Berkeley, what is true is that matter does not exist and that it is paradoxical to maintain the contrary. We are going to see how he sets about demonstrating that. I think, however, that it is not without value to insist that those who wish to study Philosophy must give deep consideration to Berkeley's theory.

I know well that Berkeley's theses will make some people smile, but it must not be forgotten that we ourselves live in the 20th century and that we have the benefit of all the studies of past times. And we will see besides, when we come to study Materialism and its history, that the Materialist philosophers of old also have their ridiculous side.

It must be known that Diderot, who before Marx and Engels was the greatest of the Materialist thinkers, did attach some importance to Berkeley's system since he describes it as a

"System which, to the shame of human wit and philosophy, is the most difficult to combat, although the most absurd of all."

Lenin himself in his book, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, devoted numerous pages to Berkeley's philosophy and wrote:

"The most modern idealist philosophers have brought against the Materialists no argument that one cannot find in Bishop Berkeley."

Finally, here is an appreciation of Berkeley's immaterialism in a Manual of the History of Philosophy, which enjoys a wide circulation to-day in the colleges:

"A theory that is doubtless still imperfect, yet is admirable and should destroy for ever in philosophic minds the belief in the existence of a material substance."

There you have the importance of Berkeley's philosophic reasoning.

### 3. The Idealism of Berkeley

The aim of this system consists then in demonstrating that matter does not exist. Berkeley says:

"Matter is not what we believe when we think that it exists outside our minds. We think that things exist because we see them, because we touch them; it is because they give us these sensations that we believe in their existence.

"But our sensations are merely ideas that we have in our minds. The objects, then, that we perceive by our senses are nothing else than our ideas, and ideas cannot exist outside our minds."

For Berkeley, things exist; he does not deny their nature and their existence, but he asserts that they only exist in the shape of the sensations which make us know them and concludes that our sensations and the objects are only one and the same thing.

That things exist is certain, but *within us*, he says, in our mind, and they have no substance outside our mind.

We conceive of things with the help of sight; we perceive them with the help of touch; the sense of smell informs us on their odour; the palate on their taste; hearing on sounds. These different sensations give us ideas which, combined together, lead us to give them a common name and consider them as objects.

"Thus, for example, a certain colour, taste, smell, shape and consistency having been observed to go together, are accounted one distinct thing, signified by the name *apple*. . . . Other collections of ideas constitute a stone, a tree, a book and the like sensible things."—(Berkeley).

We are then victims of illusions when we think we know the world and things in general to be external, since all this exists only in our mind.

In his book, *Dialogues of Hylas and Philonous*, Berkeley demonstrates this thesis in the following manner:

"Is it not an absurdity to believe that the same thing at the same moment can be different? For example hot and cold at the same instant? Imagine then that one of your hands be warm, the other cold, and that both be plunged at the same moment into a vessel full of water which has an intermediate temperature; will not the water appear warm to one hand, cold to the other?"

Since it is absurd to believe that a thing at the same moment may differ in itself, we must then conclude that this thing exists only in our mind.

What then does Berkeley do in his method of reasoning and of discussion? He strips objects, things of all their properties.

You say that objects exist because they have a colour, an odour, a taste, because they are large or small, light or heavy? I will prove to you that that exists not in the objects, but in our minds.

Here is a piece of cloth; you tell me that it is red. Is it really so? You think that the red is in the cloth itself. Is that certain? You know that there are animals who have eyes different from ours and who will not see the cloth as red; similarly a man with jaundice will see it as yellow! Then what colour is it? That depends, you say? The red then is not in the cloth, but in the eye, in us.

You say that this cloth is light? Let it fall on an ant and it will certainly find it heavy. Who then is right? You think that it is warm? If you were feverish, you would find it cold! Is it, then, hot or cold?

In a word, if the same things can be at the same moment for some red, heavy, warm, and for others

exactly the contrary, the fact is that we are victims of illusions and things exist only in our minds.

By depriving objects of all their properties, one comes thus to say that the former exist only in our thought, that is to say, that *matter is an idea*.

Already, before Berkeley, the Greek philosophers said, and correctly, that certain qualities such as flavour and sound were not in the things themselves but in us.

However, what is new in Berkeley's theory is precisely that he extends this remark to *all* the qualities of the objects.

The Greek philosophers had established the following distinction between the qualities of things: on the one hand, the *primary qualities*, that is to say those that are in the objects, such as weight, size, resistance, etc.; on the other hand, the *secondary qualities*, that is to say those that are in ourselves, such as odour, taste, warmth, etc.

Now Berkeley applies to the primary qualities the same argument as to the secondary qualities, to wit, that *all the qualities, all the properties, are not in the objects but in ourselves*.

If we look at the sun we see it round, flat and red. Science tells us that we are mistaken—that the sun is not flat, is not red. We then, with the help of science, make abstraction of certain false qualities that we impute to the sun, but without on that account concluding that it does not exist! Yet such a conclusion is Berkeley's final achievement.

Certainly Berkeley was not wrong in showing that the distinction made by the ancients did not withstand scientific analysis, but he commits an error of reasoning, a sophism, in drawing from these observations consequences that they do not warrant. In effect, he shows that the qualities of things are not such as our

senses show us, that is to say that our senses deceive us and distort the material reality, and he concludes straight away that material reality does not exist!

#### 4. Consequences of Idealist Reasoning

The thesis being "Everything exists only in our mind," one must draw the conclusion that the external world does not exist.

If we push this reasoning to its conclusion, we will come to say: "I alone exist, since I know other men only by my ideas; since the other men are for me, like material objects, only collections of ideas." This is what in philosophy is termed *Solipsism* (which means to say *only myself*).

Berkeley, Lenin tells us in his book already cited, defends himself instinctively against the accusation of supporting such a theory. One observes indeed that solipsism, the extreme form of idealism, has not been sustained by any philosopher.

That is why, when engaged in discussion with idealists, we should endeavour to bring out that the agreements which really deny the existence of matter, to be logical and consistent, must go on to that absurd extremity, *Solipsism*.

#### 5. The Idealist Arguments

We have summarised as simply as possible Berkeley's theory because it is he who has displayed most frankly what philosophical idealism is. It is certain that to understand these arguments, which are new to us, it is indispensable to take them very seriously and make an intellectual effort.

We shall see further on that if idealism is presented in a more hidden fashion, under cover of novel words and phrases, still all the idealist philosophers do no

more than take up again "old Berkeley's" arguments (Lenin).

We shall see also how the idealist philosophy which has dominated, and still dominates, the official history of Philosophy, bring with it a method of thought with which we are impregnated, has been able to penetrate into us despite our entirely secular education.

The basis of the arguments of all the idealist philosophers being found in Bishop Berkeley's reasonings, we will now, as a summary of this chapter, endeavour to extract the main arguments and what they attempt to demonstrate.

##### 1. *Spirit Creates Matter.*

Here we have, as we know, the idealist answer to the fundamental question of philosophy; it is the primary form of idealism which is reflected in the various religions in which it is asserted that the spirit created the world.

This assertion can bear two meanings.

*Either* God has created the world and it really exists outside of us. This is the ordinary idealism of the theologians<sup>1</sup>.

*Or* God has created the illusion of the world by giving us ideas which correspond to nothing. This is the "immaterialist idealism" of Bishop Berkeley, who wants to prove that Spirit is the only reality, Matter being a product fabricated by our Spirit.

That is why the idealists assert that:

##### 2. *The world does not exist outside our thought.*

That is what Berkeley desired to demonstrate to us by asserting that we err in attributing to things properties and qualities as belonging to them while these latter only exist in our mind. For the idealists,

benches and tables do not exist, but only in our thought and not outside us, because:

3. *It is our ideas which create things.*

In other words, things are the reflection of our thought. In effect, since it is the mind (spirit) which creates the illusion of matter, since it is the mind which gives to our thought the notion of matter, since the sensations which we feel from things do not arise from the things themselves but merely from thought, the cause of the reality of the world and of things is our thought, and consequently all that surrounds us has no existence outside our mind and can only be the reflection of our thought. As, however, according to Berkeley, our *mind* would be incapable of creating these ideas *by itself*, and as besides it does not make what it wants (as would happen if it created 1. Theology is the "science" (!!!) which deals with God and divine matters.

them itself) it must be admitted that there is another more powerful Spirit who is their creator. It is God then who creates our mind and imposes on us all the ideas of the world that we will meet there.

These are the principal theses on which the idealist doctrines rest and the answers they give to the basic question of philosophy.

It is now time to see what is the answer of Materialist philosophy to this question and to the problems raised by the above theses.

### READING

Berkeley—*Dialogues of Hylas and Philonous.*

Lenin—*Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (pp. 1-20).

## CHAPTER III. MATERIALISM

1. Why must we study Materialism?
2. Where does Materialism come from?
3. How and why has Materialism developed?
4. What are the principles and arguments of the Materialists?
  - (i) It is Matter which produces mind.
  - (ii) Matter exists outside all mind.
  - (iii) Science by means of experience allows us to know things.

### 1. Why must we study Materialism?

We have seen that to the question, "What are the relations between being and thought?" there can only be two answers which are opposed and contradictory.

In the last chapter we studied the idealist answer and the arguments presented in defence of idealist philosophy. We must now examine the second answer to this fundamental question (the question, allow us to repeat, which is to be found at the root of every philosophy), and see what are the arguments Materialism brings to its defence. And so much the more as Materialism is very important to us, for it is the philosophy of Marxism.

Consequently, it is indispensable that we know Materialism well. Indispensable, above all, because the concepts of this philosophy are very poorly known

and have been falsified. Indispensable also because by our education, by the instruction that has been given to us, whether in the primary or in the higher schools, by our way of living and of reasoning, we are all, more or less, without our being aware of it, soaked with idealist concepts. (In later chapters, besides, we will see several examples of this and why it is so.)

It is then an absolute necessity for those who wish to study Marxism to know its basis, Materialism.

## 2. Where does Materialism come from?

We have defined philosophy in a general way as an effort to explain the world, the universe. But we know that according to the state of human knowledge, its explanations have changed and that two attitudes have been taken in the course of Man's history by those who have attempted to explain the world. One, anti-scientific, making appeal to one or several higher spirits, to supernatural forces; the other, scientific, basing itself on facts and experience.

One of these concepts is defended by idealist philosophers; the other, by the materialists.

That is why, from the beginning of this book, we have said that the primary idea that we must form of materialism is that this philosophy represents the "scientific explanation of the Universe."

If Idealism was born from the ignorance of men—and we will see how ignorance was preserved and fed in the history of society by the forces which shared idealist concepts — Materialism was born from the struggle of science against ignorance or obscurantism.

That is why this philosophy has been so fiercely fought, and why, even in our day in its modern form, Dialectical Materialism, it is little known, if not ignored or misconceived, in the official educational world.

## 3. How and why has Materialism developed?

Contrary to what those claim who combat this philosophy and who say that this doctrine has not evolved over twenty centuries, the history of Materialism discloses to us in this philosophy something alive and always in motion.

In the course of centuries, Man's scientific knowledge made progress. At the beginning of the history of thought, in Grecian antiquity, scientific knowledge was extremely slight, and the first scientists were also philosophers, because in that epoch Philosophy and the nascent sciences were one, Philosophy being only an extension of the sciences.

Subsequently, as the sciences brought exact explanations of the phenomena of the world, explanations which disturbed and even contradicted those of the idealist philosophers, a conflict arose between Philosophy and Science.

The Sciences being in contradiction with the official philosophy of that age, it had become necessary that they should be separated from it. So "There was nothing more urgent for the sciences than freeing themselves from the philosophic medley of trash and leaving to the philosophers the vast hypotheses, in order that they should make contact with the limited problems, those ripe for an early solution. Then was made this distinction between sciences and philosophy." (R. Maublanc.)

But materialism, born with the sciences, intimately connected with them and dependent on them, has advanced and evolved with them, to succeed with modern materialism, that of Marx and Engels, in uniting anew Science and Philosophy in Dialectical Materialism.

Later we will study further this history and evolution which are connected with the progress of civilisation. However we observe already, and it is exceedingly important to keep this in mind, that Materialism and the Sciences are bound together and Materialism is absolutely dependent on Science.

It remains to us to establish and define the bases of Materialism, bases, common to all philosophies, which under different aspects proclaim themselves materialists.

#### 4. What are the principles and the arguments of the Materialists?

To answer this, we must return to the basic question of philosophy, that of the relations between being and thought; which is principal?

The materialists at once assert that there is a specific relation between being and thought, between matter and spirit. For them, it is being, matter, which is the primordial element, the first thing, and the spirit, the mind, which is the secondary thing, coming after and dependent on matter.

For the materialists, then, it is not the mind or God who created the world and matter, but it is the world, nature, matter that have created the mind.

"Mind itself is merely the highest product of matter." (Engels, *Feuerbach*). That is why if we again ask the question that we put in the second chapter, "How comes it that man thinks?" the materialists answer that man thinks because he has a brain and that thought is the product of the brain. For them there cannot be thinking without matter, without a body.

"Our consciousness and thinking, however supra-sensuous they may seem, are the product of a material, bodily organ, the brain." [Engels (*idem*).]

Consequently, for materialists, matter, being, are something real, existing outside our thought, and have no need of thought or mind to exist. Similarly, mind cannot exist without matter, and there is no immortal soul which is independent of the body.

Contrary to what the idealists say, the things which surround us exist, independently of us; they give us our thoughts; our ideas are only the reflection of things in our brain.

That is why, regarding the second aspect of the question of the relations between being and thinking:—

"In what relation do our thoughts about the world surrounding us stand to this world itself? Is our thinking capable of cognition of the real world? Are we able in our ideas and notions of the real world to produce a correct reflection of reality? In philosophical language this question is called the question of the identity of thinking and being." [Engels (*idem*)].

The materialists say: Yes, we can know the world, and the ideas we form of the world grow more and more correct since we are able to study it with the aid of the sciences and these prove to us continually by experience that the things which surround us have indeed a life which is peculiar to them, independent of us, and that Man can already in part reproduce these things.

To sum up, we will say then that materialists, facing the basic problem of philosophy, assert:

1. *That it is matter which produces mind* and that, scientifically, mind has never been seen without matter.
2. *That Matter exists outside all mind* and that it has no need of mind to exist, having an existence which is peculiar to it, and that, in consequence, contrary to what the idealists say, it is not our ideas which create things, but it is the things which give us our ideas.

3. *That we are capable of knowing the world, that the ideas that we form of matter and the world are becoming more and more correct, since with the help of science we can make exact what we already know and discover what we as yet are ignorant of.*

## CHAPTER IV.

### WHO IS RIGHT, THE IDEALIST OR THE MATERIALIST ?

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1. How must we pose the problem?
2. Is it true that the world exists only in our thinking?
3. Is it true that it is our ideas that create things?
4. Is it true that mind creates matter?
5. The Materialists are right and science proves their assertions.

#### 1. How must we pose the problem?

Now that we know the theses of the idealists and the materialists, we are going to attempt to discover who is right. Let us recall that we must at once note that on the one hand these theses are absolutely opposed and contradictory; on the other, that immediately one defends one or the other theory, that theory brings us conclusions which are exceedingly important in their consequences.

In order to know who is right, we must refer to the three points with which we have summed up each discussion.

The idealists assert:

1. That it is mind which creates matter.
2. That matter does not exist outside our thinking, that for us then it is only an illusion.
3. That it is our ideas which create things.

The materialists assert the exact opposite.

To facilitate our work, we must study first that which falls under common sense and that which is most astonishing.

1. Is it true that the world exists only in our thinking?
2. Is it true that it is our ideas which create things? These are two arguments defended by the "immaterialist" idealism of Berkeley, whose conclusions lead, as in all theologies, to our third question:
3. Is it true that mind creates matter?

These are very important questions since they are related to the fundamental problem of philosophy. Consequently it is in discussing them that we are going to discover who is right; and the questions are particularly interesting to materialists, in the sense that the answers they give to these questions are common to all materialist philosophies.

## 2. Is it true that the World exists solely in our thinking?

Before studying this question, we must establish two philosophic terms which we are called upon to use and which we will very often meet in our reading:

*Subjective Reality* (which means reality which exists only in our thinking).

*Objective Reality* (reality which exists outside our thinking).

The idealists say that the world is not an objective, but a subjective reality. The materialists say that the world is an objective reality.

In order to demonstrate that the world and things exist only in our thinking, Bishop Berkeley resolves them into their properties (colour, size, density, etc.).

He demonstrates that these properties, which vary according to the individuals who perceive them, are not in the things themselves, but in the mind of each of us. He deduces from this that matter is a collection of properties which are subjective, not objective, and consequently it does not exist.

If we take again the example of the sun, Berkeley asks if we believe in the objective reality of the red disc, and he demonstrates, with his method of discussing properties, that the sun is not red and is not a disc. Therefore, the sun is not an objective reality, for it does not exist of itself, but is a mere subjective reality, since it exists only in our thinking.

The materialists assert that the sun exists none the less, not because we see it as a flat red disc, for that belongs to naive realism, that of children and primitive men who had only their senses to deal with reality; but they assert that the sun exists by calling science to their aid. Science permits us to correct the errors which our senses lead us into.

Still we must, in this example of the sun, pose the question clearly. With Berkeley, we agree that the sun is not a disc and is not red, but we do not accept his conclusion, the negation of the sun as an objective reality.

We are not discussing the properties of things, but their existence. We are not discussing whether our senses deceive us and distort material reality, but whether this reality exists outside our senses.

Now, the materialists assert the existence of this reality outside of ourselves and furnish arguments which are Science itself.

What do the idealists do in order to demonstrate to us that they are right? They argue about words, make long speeches, write numerous pages.

Suppose for a moment that they are correct. If the world exists solely in our thinking, then the world did not exist before men? We know that is false because science proves to us that man appeared at a very late date upon the earth. Certain idealists will tell us that there were animals before men and thought could have dwelt in them. But we know that before the animals there was an uninhabitable earth on which no organic life was possible. Others will tell us that even if the solar system existed alone and man was not in existence, thought and mind would exist in God. So we come to the supreme form of idealism. We must choose between God and Science. Idealism cannot be sustained without God and God cannot exist without idealism.

There, then, is exactly how the question of idealism and materialism is posed. Who is right? God or Science?

God is a pure spirit, creator of matter, an assertion without proof.

Science will prove to us by experience and practice that the world is an objective reality, and it will enable us to answer the question.

### 3. Is it true that it is our ideas which create things?

Take for example an omnibus which passes at the moment we are crossing the street in the company of an idealist with whom we are discussing whether things have an objective or subjective reality, and whether it is true that it is our ideas which create things. It is quite certain that if we do not want to be crushed, we will have to pay attention. In practice then, the idealist is compelled to recognise the existence of the omnibus. For him, practically speaking, there is no difference between an objective omnibus and a

subjective omnibus, and this is so correct that practice provides the proof that idealists in actual life are materialists.

On this subject we could cite numerous examples in which we would see that the idealist philosophers and their supporters do not disdain certain "objective" base actions in order to obtain what for them is only subjective reality!

Moreover, that is why one no longer sees anyone assert, as Berkeley did, that the world does not exist. The arguments are much more subtle and more covert. Consult for an example of the idealists' style of argument the chapter entitled "The discovery of the elements of the world" in Lenin's book, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*.

It is then, according to Lenin's phrase, "the criterion of practice" which will enable us to confound the idealists.

These latter, moreover, will not fail to say that theory and practice are not alike and that they are two entirely different things. That is not true. Practice alone, by experience, will demonstrate to us whether a concept is correct or false.

The example of the omnibus, then, shows that the world has objective reality and is not an illusion created by our minds. Now it remains for us to see, it being given that Berkeley's theory of immaterialism cannot stand up against science nor resist the criterion of practice, whether, as all the conclusions of the idealist philosophies of religions and theologies state, the mind creates matter.

### 4. Is it true that mind creates matter?

As we have seen above, the mind, for the idealists, has its supreme form in God. He is the final answer,

the conclusion of their theory, and that is why the problem Mind — Matter in the last analysis is set in the form of the question "God or Science," if we are to know who is right, the idealist or the materialist.

The idealists assert that God has existed from all eternity and that, having undergone no change, he is ever the same. He is pure spirit for whom time and space do not exist. He is the creator of matter.

In order to uphold their affirmation of God, there again the idealists present no argument. In order to defend the Creator of Matter, they have recourse to a lot of mysteries that no scientific mind can accept.

When one goes back to the beginnings of science and sees that it was in the depths of their great ignorance that primitive men framed in their minds the idea of God, one also observes that the idealists of the 20th century continue, like the primitive men, to ignore all that patient and persevering labour has made known. For, in the final reckoning, God, according to the idealists, cannot be explained and he remains for them a belief without proof.

When the idealists wish to "prove" to us the necessity of a creation of the world by saying that matter could not have always existed, that it must have been born, they explain to us that God himself has never had a beginning. In what way is this explanation any clearer?

To sustain their arguments, the materialists on the contrary avail themselves of science, which man has developed in proportion to the extent in which he has pushed back "the bounds of his ignorance."

Now does science permit us to think that mind has created matter? No. The idea of creation by pure mind is incomprehensible, for we know of nothing such in our experience. For that to be possible, it would have been necessary, as the idealists say, that mind

existed alone before matter, while science demonstrates to us that that is not possible and that there never is mind without matter. On the contrary, mind is always united to matter, and we observe in particular that the mind of man is bound to the brain which is the source of our ideas and our thought. Science does not permit us to conceive that ideas exist in a void.

So the spirit God, in order to be able to exist, must have a brain. That is why we can say that it is not God who created matter, and therefore man, but that it is matter, in the shape of the human brain, that has created the Spirit—God.

Further on we will see whether science gives us the possibility of believing in a God, or in anything on which time will have no effect and for which Space, motion and change would not exist. From now onwards we can conclude that in their answer to the fundamental problem of philosophy:

## 5. The Materialists are right and Science proves their assertions

The materialists are right in asserting:

1. Against the idealism of Berkeley and against the philosophers who hide behind his immaterialism, that the world and things on the one hand really exist outside our thinking and that they have no need of our thinking to exist; on the other hand, that it is not our ideas which create things but that on the contrary it is things which give us our ideas.

2. Against all the idealist philosophers, because their conclusions end in asserting the creation of matter by the mind, that is to say in the last analysis in asserting the existence of God and in supporting theological religions, the materialists, basing themselves on the sciences, assert and prove that it is matter which

creates the mind and that they have no need of the "hypothesis of God" to explain the creation of matter.

NOTE.—We must pay attention to the fashion in which the idealists pose the problems. They assert that God created man, whereas we have seen that it is man who has created God. They assert also, on the other hand, that it is mind that has created matter, whereas we see that it is in truth exactly the contrary. There you have a way of turning the picture upside down that we must expose.

### READING

Lenin: *Materialism\* and Empirio-criticism*. Sections, "Did Nature exist before man?"; and "Does man think with his brain?"

Engels: *Ludwig Feuerbach*. Section on "Idealism and Materialism."

## CHAPTER V.

### IS THERE A THIRD PHILOSOPHY? AGNOSTICISM

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1. Why a third philosophy?
2. Arguments of this third philosophy.
3. Where does this philosophy come from?
4. Its consequences.
5. How we should refute these arguments.
6. Conclusion.

#### 1. Why a Third Philosophy?

It might seem to us, after the preceding chapters, that, all in all, it ought to be sufficiently easy to find our way in the midst of all philosophical arguments since there are only two great trends, to one of which theory must belong: idealism and materialism. And that, moreover, the arguments on the materialist side are definitely convincing. It would appear then, that after some examination we have found the road which leads to the philosophy of reason—Materialism. But things are not so simple. As we have already indicated, the modern idealists have not the frankness of Bishop Berkeley. They present their ideas

"in a much more artful form, and confused by the use of a new terminology, so that these thoughts may be taken by naive people for 'recent' philosophy." (Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*).

We have seen that to the basic question of philosophy one can give two answers which are totally opposed, contradictory and irreconcilable. These two answers are very clear and do not allow of any confusion.

And, in effect, about 1710, the problem was set as follows: On one side, those who affirmed the existence of matter outside our thinking, they were the Materialists; and on the other side those who with Berkeley denied the existence of matter and claimed that it only existed in us, in our mind; they were the Idealists.

A little later, the sciences advancing, some other philosophers then intervened who attempted to abolish the division between the idealists and the materialists, by creating a philosophic current which should cast confusion among these two theories, and this confusion finds its origin in the search for a *third* philosophy.

## 2. The Argument of this Third Philosophy

The basis of this philosophy, which was elaborated after Berkeley, is that it is useless to seek to know the real nature of things, and that we will always know only the appearances. That is why this philosophy is named *Agnosticism* (from the Greek *a*, negation, and *gnosticos*, capable of knowing; therefore, "incapable of knowing").

According to the Agnostics, it cannot be known whether the world is at bottom mind or nature. It is possible for us to know the appearance of things, but we cannot know the reality of them.

Let us again take the sun as example. We have seen that it is not as primitive men thought, a flat red disc. This disc was, then, only an illusion, an

appearance (appearance is the superficial idea we have of things, it is not their reality).

That is why, considering that the idealists and the materialists dispute with each other whether things are matter or mind, whether they exist outside our thinking or not, whether it is possible for us to know them or not, the agnostics say that one can know the appearance, but never the reality.

Our senses, they say, permit us to see and feel things, to know their external aspects, their appearances; these appearances then exist for us; they constitute what is called in philosophic language the "thing for us." However, we cannot know the thing independent of us, with its own reality, which is called the "thing in itself."

The idealists and materialists, who argue incessantly on these subjects, are comparable to two men, one with blue glasses, one with red, who are walking in the snow and arguing as to its real colour. Let us suppose that they cannot remove their glasses. Could they ever know the real colour of the snow? No. Well, the idealists and materialists who argue with each other as to who is right, wear blue and red glasses. They will never know the reality. They will have a knowledge of the snow "for them," each in his own fashion, but they will never know the snow "in itself." Such is the argument of the agnostics.

## 3. Where does this Philosophy come from?

The founders of this philosophy are Hume (1711-1776), who was English, and Kant (1724-1804), who was German. Both attempted to reconcile idealism and materialism. Here is a passage of Hume's argument cited by Lenin in his *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*:

"It seems evident that men are carried by a natural instinct or prepossession, to repose faith in their senses;

and that, without any reasoning, or even almost before the use of reason, we always suppose an external universe, which depends not on our perception, but would exist though we and every sensible creature were absent or annihilated . . . . But this universal and primary opinion of all men is soon destroyed by the slightest philosophy, which teaches us that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception, and that the senses are only the inlets, through which these images are conveyed, without being able to produce any intermediate intercourse between the mind and the object. The table, which we see, seems to diminish as we remove further from it: but the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration. It was, therefore, nothing but its image, which was present to the mind. These are the obvious dictates of reason."

We see that Hume admits straight away what falls under common sense: the "existence of an external universe," which does not depend on us. But, immediately, he refuses to admit this existence as being an objective reality. For him, this existence is nothing but an image, and our senses which observe this existence, this image, are incapable of establishing any relation whatever between the mind and the object.

In a word, we live amidst things as at the cinema where we observe on the screen the image of objects, their existence, but where behind the images themselves, that is, behind the screen, there is nothing. And if we want to know how our mind has knowledge of objects, that might be due "to the energy of the mind itself, or from the suggestion of some invisible and unknown spirit, or from some other cause still unknown to us." (Hume.)

#### 4. Its consequences

There you have a seductive theory which moreover is very widespread. In the course of History, we will find it again under different aspects and, in our days,

with those who claim "to remain neutral and maintain a scientific reserve."

We must now examine whether these arguments are correct and what consequences flow from them.

If it is truly impossible, as the agnostics assert, for us to know the veritable nature of things, and if our knowledge is limited to their appearance, we cannot then assert the existence of objective reality, and we cannot know if things exist of themselves. For us, for example, the omnibus is an objective reality; the agnostic tells us that it is not certain, one cannot tell whether this omnibus is an idea or a reality. So it is not possible for us to maintain that our thought is the reflection of things. We see that there we have an entirely idealist reasoning; for between asserting that things do not exist or merely that one cannot know whether they exist, the difference is not great!

We have seen that the agnostic distinguishes between "things for us" and "things in themselves." The study of "things for us" is therefore possible; that is science; but the study of "things in themselves" is impossible because we cannot know what exists outside us.

The result of this reasoning is as follows: The agnostic accepts Science; he believes in it and he wishes to build it and, as one can only construct science on the condition of expelling all supernatural forces from nature, concerning science he is materialist.

But he hastens to add that, science giving us nothing but appearances, it does not prove that there is not something else than matter in reality, or indeed that matter exists or that God does not exist. Human reason can know nothing of this and therefore should not meddle in these matters. If there are other means of knowing "things in themselves" such as religious faith, the agnostic does not want to know it and does not give himself the right to discuss it.

The agnostic then is, as to the conduct of life and the building of science, a materialist; but he is a materialist who does not dare to assert his materialism, and who seeks above all not to get into difficulties with the idealists, nor to enter into conflict with religions. He is a "shamefaced materialist." (Engels.)

The result is that, distrusting the profound value of science, seeing in it nothing but illusions, this third philosophy proposes that we should not attribute any truth to science, and that we should consider it perfectly useless to seek to know anything, to attempt to hasten progress.

The agnostics say: Formerly men saw the sun as a flat disc and believed that such was the reality; they were mistaken. To-day science tells us that the sun is not such as we see it and it claims to explain everything.

We know meanwhile that science is often mistaken, destroying in the morning what she built the night before. Error yesterday, truth today, but error tomorrow. So, the agnostics affirm, we cannot *know*; reason brings us no certainty. And if other means than reason, such as religious faith, claim to give us the absolute certainties, even science cannot prevent us from believing. By lessening our trust in science, agnosticism is preparing the return of the religions.

### 5. How we must refute these arguments

We have seen that, to prove their assertions, the materialists avail themselves not only of science, but also of *experience* which permits the sciences to be controlled. Thanks to the "criterion of practice" one can *know*, one can get fully acquainted with things.

The agnostics tell us that it is impossible to assert either that the external world exists or that it does not exist.

Now, through practice, we know that the world and things exist. We know that the ideas which we form of things are correct, that the relations that we have established between things and us are real.

"From the moment that we submit these objects to our use, conformably to the qualities that we perceive in them, we submit to an infallible test, the correctness or falsity of our sensory perceptions. If these perceptions were false, our estimate of the use that can be made of an object ought to be equally so, and our attempt should fail. But if we succeed in attaining our ends, if we see that the object is in accordance with the idea that we had of it and corresponds to the design into which we made it enter, it is a positive proof that our perceptions of the objects and of its qualities are in accord with a reality external to ourselves; and each time that we meet a check we generally take little time to discover the cause of our failure; we ourselves see that the perception on which we had based our action was either incomplete and superficial, or combined with the results of other perceptions in such a manner that they did not guarantee what we call true reasoning. So long as we care to train and use our senses properly and to keep our action within the limits prescribed by perceptions properly obtained and properly used, we perceive that the result of our action proves the conformity of our perceptions with the objective nature of the thing perceived. In any case, we have not yet been led to the conclusion that our sensory perceptions scientifically controlled produce in our minds ideas about the external world which may be by their very nature in disaccord with reality, or that there may be an inherent incompatibility between the world and the sensory perceptions that we have of it." (Engels.)

Using Engels' example, we will say "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." If it did not exist or if it was only an idea, after eating it our hunger would be in no way appeased. Thus it is perfectly possible for us to know things, to see if our ideas correspond to reality. It is possible for us to control the conclusions of science by experiment and by industry, which carries into practical application the theoretical

results of the sciences. That we can *make* synthetic rubber means that science knows the "thing in itself" which is rubber.

We see, therefore, that it is not without value to seek to know who is right, since despite the theoretical errors which science can make, experience every time gives us the proof that it is science indeed which is right.

## 6. Conclusion

Since the 18th century, with the various thinkers who have borrowed more or less largely from agnosticism, we see that this philosophy is under fire sometimes from idealism, sometimes from materialism. Under cover of new words, as Lenin says, claiming even to avail themselves of the sciences to prop up their arguments, they do nothing but create confusion between the two theories, thus allowing some to have a comfortable philosophy which gives them the chance to declare that they are not idealist because they avail themselves of science, but that they are not materialists either because they do not dare to carry their arguments to their conclusion, because they are not consistent.

"What then is Agnosticism," said Engels, "if not a shame-faced materialism? The agnostic conception of nature is entirely materialistic. The natural world, in its entirety, is ruled by laws and excludes all external interference absolutely. But, it adds, we have no means of asserting or denying the existence of some supreme being beyond the known universe."

This philosophy, then, plays the game of idealism and in the final reckoning, because they are inconsistent in their arguments, the agnostics finish in idealism. "Scratch the agnostic," said Lenin, "and you will find an idealist."

We have seen that one can ascertain which is right, materialism or idealism.

Now we see that the theories which claim to reconcile these two philosophies can in fact only support idealism; that they do not bring a third answer to the basic question of philosophy and, consequently, *there is no third philosophy.*

## QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION: (1) What importance has the study of philosophy to the militant worker? (2) What is the more special importance to him of Dialectical Materialism?

CHAPTER I.: (1) What is the fundamental problem of philosophy? (2) Explain and correct the current confusion to which the words materialism and idealism give rise.

CHAPTER II: What are the main idealist arguments?

CHAPTER III: What are the points of opposition between idealism and materialism?

CHAPTER IV.: What must you answer to those who claim that the world exists only in our thinking?

CHAPTER V.: Between materialism and idealism, is there room for a third philosophy?

PART II.

PHILOSOPHICAL MATERIALISM

## CHAPTER I.

# MATTER AND THE MATERIALISTS

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1. What is matter?
2. Successive theories of matter.
3. What matter is for the materialists.
4. Materialist definitions on the concept of matter.
5. Conclusion.

After having defined, in the first place, the ideas common to all materialists; next, the arguments of all the materialists against the idealist philosophers, and lastly, demonstrated the error of agnosticism, we are going to draw conclusions from this teaching and strengthen our materialist arguments by giving our answers to the two following questions:—

1. What is matter?
2. What does being materialist mean?

### 1. What is Matter?

*Importance of the Question:* Every time that we have a problem to solve we must pose the question very clearly. In fact, in this case it is not so simple to give a satisfactory answer. In order to achieve such an answer, we have to form a theory of matter.

In general, people think that matter is what one can touch, and is hard and resistant. In ancient Greece, that was how matter was defined.

To-day, thanks to the sciences we know that to be inexact.

## 2. Successive Theories of Matter

(Our aim is to review as simply as possible the various theories relating to matter without entering into scientific explanation.)

In Greece, it was thought that matter was something hard which could not be divided to an infinite extent. A moment comes, it was said, when the pieces are no longer divisible; and these particles were called atoms. It was also thought that these atoms were different from each other; that there were smooth and round atoms such as those of oil; and others rough and hooked, like those of vinegar.

It was Democritus, a materialist of ancient times, who set up this theory; it was he who first attempted to give a materialist explanation of the world. He thought, for example, that the human body was composed of coarse atoms, that the soul was a conglomerate of finer atoms and, as he admitted the existence of Gods and yet wanted to explain everything in accordance with this materialist standpoint, he asserted that the Gods themselves were composed of extra fine atoms.

From antiquity, then, men have tried to explain what matter was. The middle ages added nothing very new to the theory of atoms elaborated by the Greeks. It was only in the 19th century that this theory was profoundly modified.

It was thought that matter was divided into atoms, that these latter were very hard particles which attracted each other. The Greek theory had been abandoned, and the atoms were no longer hooked or smooth, but people continued to maintain that they were hard, in-

divisible, and underwent a movement of attraction, each to the other. Subsequently, progress has permitted the sciences to be more specific and to go further in the explanation of matter. Today, it is demonstrated that the atom is a centre around which gravitates a tiny system of planets carrying tiny electric charges. The centre, or nucleus of the atom, is itself complex and of very varied structure. Matter is a conglomerate of these atoms and if our hand placed on a table experiences a resistance, it is because the hand is receiving an incalculable number of electric charges, of shocks, coming from these tiny systems which are the atoms.

To this new modern theory in explanation of matter, a theory confirmed by scientific experiments, the idealists have retorted, "What, no more hard matter! Consequently, there is no longer any matter! The materialists who base their philosophy on the resistance of matter, have no longer any proofs. Matter has vanished."

It must indeed be said that this style of argument has had some success since even certain Marxists, who are therefore materialists, have been shaken in their convictions. However it is merely clouding the question to speak of the suppression of matter, because its composition is specified more exactly.

What is important, what is necessary, is to see

## 3. What Matter is for the Materialists

On this subject, it is indispensable that a distinction is made. We must see first

1. What is matter? then
2. What is matter like?

The answer which the materialists give to the first question is that matter is an external reality, indepen-

dent of mind, which has no need of mind to exist. Lenin said on this subject:

"The concept of matter expresses nothing more than the objective reality which is given us in sensation." (Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, p. 323.)

Now to the second question, "What is matter like?", the materialists say, "It is not for us to answer, it is for science to do so." The first answer has not varied from antiquity down to the present day. The second answer has varied and must vary because it depends on the sciences, on the state of human knowledge. It is not a final answer.

We see that it is absolutely indispensable to pose the problem properly and not allow the idealists to mix the two questions. They must be separated, and it must be shown that it is the first which is the main question and that our answer to it has always been exactly the same.

"For the sole 'property' of matter with whose recognition philosophical materialism is bound up is the property of being an objective reality, of existing outside our mind." (Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, p. 317.)

#### 4. Materialist definitions on the concept of Matter

If we assert, because we observe it, that matter exists outside of us, we specify also:

1. That matter exists in time and space.
2. That matter is in motion.

On these points the idealists think that space and time are ideas in our minds (it was Kant who first supported this argument). For them, space is a form which we give to things; space is born from the mind of man. Similarly for Time.

The materialists assert, on the contrary, that space is not in us, but it is we who are in space. They assert

also that Time is an indispensable condition for the unfolding of our life, and that, in consequence, matter is what exists in time and space, outside our thinking.

"The basic forms of all being are space and time, and existence out of time is just as gross an absurdity as existence out of space." (Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, p. 52.)

We think that there is a reality independent of the consciousness. We all believe that the world existed before us and that it will continue to exist after us. We are persuaded that Paris existed before our birth and that unless it is finally razed to the ground it will exist after our death. We are certain that Paris exists, even when we are not thinking of it, similarly that there are tens of thousands of towns that we have never visited, of which we do not know even the name and which exist nevertheless. Such is the general conviction of mankind. The sciences have enabled us to give this argument a precision and solidity which reduce to nothing all the hair-splitting of the idealists.

"Natural science positively asserts that the earth once existed in such a state that no man or any other creature existed or could have existed on it. Organic matter is a later phenomenon, the fruit of a long evolution." (Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, p. 140.)

The sciences furnish us with the proof that matter exists in time and space and at the same time they inform us that matter is in motion. This latter piece of exact knowledge, which is supplied by modern science, is exceedingly important, because it destroys the old theory according to which matter is incapable of motion.

"Motion is the mode of existence, the manner of living of matter—matter without motion is just as unthinkable as motion without matter." (Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, p. 70.)

We know that the world in its present state is the result, in all its parts, of a long evolution and, consequently, the result of a slow but continuous motion.

We specify, then, after having demonstrated the existence of matter, that—

“There is nothing in the world but matter in motion, and matter in motion cannot move otherwise than in space and time.” (Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, p. 236.)

## 5. Conclusion

It results from these observations that the idea of God, the idea of a “pure spirit,” creator of the universe, is impossible, for a God outside space and time is something that cannot *exist*. One must share idealist mysticism, and in consequence disallow any scientific checking up, to believe in a God existing outside time, that is to say, existing at no moment, and existing outside space, that is to say existing nowhere.

The materialists, fortified by the conclusions of science, assert that matter exists in space and at a certain moment (in time). Consequently, the universe could not have been created, for God, to be able to create the world, would have needed a moment which was at no moment (since time for God does not exist), and it would have been necessary also that the world came out of nothing. In order to admit the Creation, it is necessary then to admit, first, that there was a moment in which the universe did not exist, and next that out of nothing something came, and science cannot admit this.

We see that the idealist arguments confronted with science cannot be sustained, while those of the materialist philosophers are one with science itself. So we emphasise, once again, the intimate relation between materialism and science.

## CHAPTER II.

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MATERIALIST?

1. Union of Theory and Practice.
2. What does it mean to be a partisan of Materialism in the domain of thought?
3. How is one a Materialist in practice?
  - (a) First aspect of the question.
  - (b) Second aspect of the question.
4. Conclusion.

### 1. Union of Theory and Practice

The aim of the study that we are pursuing is to secure recognition of what Marxism is, to see how the philosophy of materialism, in becoming dialectical, becomes identified with Marxism. We already know that one of the bases of this philosophy is the close tie between theory and practice. That is why we feel it is useful to point out that in carrying on these successive studies, we are applying that method of research known as dialectics.

After having seen *what* matter is for the materialists, then *what* matter is like, it is indispensable, after these two theoretical questions, to see what it means to be a materialist, that is to say, how does the materialist act? That is the practical side of these questions.

The basis of materialism is the recognition of being as the creator of thought. But is it sufficient to con-

tinually repeat that? To be a real supporter of consistent materialism, one must be so: (1) In the realm of thought; (2) In the realm of action.

## 2. What does it mean to be a supporter of Materialism in the Realm of Thought?

To be a supporter of materialism in the domain of thought means to know the basic formula of materialism: being produces thought, and to know how this formula can be applied.

When we say "Being produces thought," we have there an *abstract* formula, because the words *being* and *thought* are abstract words. "Being" means being in general; "Thought," means thought in general. Being, like thought *in general*, is a subjective reality (see First Section, Chapter IV., the explanation of subjective reality and of objective reality); *it does not exist*; it is what is termed an *abstraction*. To say "Being produces thought" is therefore an abstract formula, because it is composed of abstractions.

Thus for example: We know horses, but if we speak of the horse, it is of horses *in general* that we want to speak; well, the horse in general, that is an abstraction. If we put in place of the horse man or being *in general*, there again we have abstractions.

Now if the horse in general does not exist, what does exist? Answer, horses in particular, particular horses. The veterinary who said, "I tend the horse in general but not any particular horse," would be ridiculous; similarly, the doctor who said the same with regard to man.

We know, then, that being in general does not exist, but that particular beings exist who have particular qualities. It is the same with thought. We say then, that as to being in general, it is something abstract

and as to a particular being that is something concrete; and similarly of thought in general and particular thought.

*The materialist is he who can recognise under all circumstances, who can make it concrete, where is the being and where is the thought.*

Example: The brain and our ideas.

We must know how to apply the abstract general formula as a concrete formula. The materialist will, therefore, identify the brain as the being, and our ideas as thought. He will reason thus: it is the brain (being) that produces our ideas (thought). You have a simple example there. Now let us take human society, and let us see how a materialist will reason.

The life of human society is composed on the whole of an economic life and of a political life. What are the relations between the economic life and the political life? What is the primary factor of this abstract formula of which we want to make a concrete formula?

For the materialist, the primary factor, that is to say being, that which gives life, is the economic life. The secondary factor, the thought which is created by being and which cannot live without it, is the political life.

The materialist, then, will say that the economic life *explains* political life, since the political life is a product of the economic life. This observation that we have just made in a summary fashion is what is termed *Historical Materialism* and was first made by Marx and Engels.

Here is a somewhat more delicate example—the poet. It is certain that many elements must be taken into account to "explain" the poet; however, we want to demonstrate one aspect of this question here.

It is generally said that the poet writes because he is impelled to do so by inspiration. Does that sufficiently explain why the poet writes this rather than that? No; the poet certainly has ideas in his head, but he is also a being who lives in society. We will see that the primary factor, that which gives to the poet his own life, is the society, then, the secondary factor is the ideas which the poet has in his brain. Consequently, *one* of the elements, the fundamental element, which "explains" the poet, will be the society, that is to say the milieu in which he lives in this society. (We will meet the poet again, when we study dialectics, for we will then have all the elements for a proper study of the question.)

We see, by these examples, that the materialist is he who knows how to apply everywhere and always, at every moment and in every case, the formula of materialism. To act thus is the only way to be consistent.

### 3. How is one a Materialist in practice?

#### 1. *First aspect of the question.*

We have seen that there is no third philosophy and that, if one is not consistent in the application of materialism, either one is idealist, or else one gets a mixture of idealism and materialism.

The bourgeois scientist, in his studies and experiments, is always materialist. To make advances in science, it is necessary to work on matter; and if the scientist really thought that matter exists only in the mind, he would deem it useless to make experiments.

There are then several varieties of scientists—

1. Scientists who are conscious and consistent materialists as in the U.S.S.R. (those, for example, who

were co-authors of the two books, *In the Light of Marxism.*)

2. The scientists who are materialists without knowing it; that is to say nearly all, because it is impossible to do scientific work without accepting the existence of matter. But amongst these latter there must be distinguished:

(a) Those who begin to follow materialism; but who stop because they do not dare to call themselves materialists; these are the agnostics, those whom Engels termed "shamefaced materialists."

(b) Next, the scientists who are unconscious and inconsistent materialists. They are materialists in the laboratory; away from work they are idealists, believers, religious.

In fact these last have not known how to, or have not desired to put their ideas in order. They are in perpetual contradiction with themselves. They separate their materialist work from their philosophic concepts. They are "scientists" and yet even if they do not expressly deny the existence of matter, they think (which is hardly scientific) that it is of no use to know the real nature of things. They are "scientists," and yet without any proof they believe things which are impossible. (See the cases of Pasteur, Branly and others who were believers, while the scientist, if he is consistent, must abandon his religious faith). Science and belief are absolutely opposed.

#### 2. *Second aspect of the question.*

*Materialism and action:* If it is true that the veritable materialist is he who applies the formula which is at the base of this philosophy, everywhere and in all cases, he must pay attention to applying it properly and well.

As we have just seen, it is necessary to be consistent; and, to be a consistent materialist, it is necessary to carry materialism into action.

Being materialist in practice means to act in conformity with the philosophy by taking as the primary and most important factor, *reality*, and as the secondary factor, *thought*.

We are now going to see what positions are taken by those who, unsuspectingly, take thought as the primary factor and so are at the moment idealists without knowing it.

1. What do we call a man who lives as if he were alone in the world? He is called an *individualist*. He lives turned inwards on himself; the external world exists solely for him. For him the important thing is *himself*, that is his thought. There you have a pure idealist, or what is termed a solipsist. (See the explanation of this word in the First Section, Chapter II.)

The individualist is an *egotist*, and egotism is not a materialist attitude. The egotist takes the world for himself and limits the world to himself.

2. He who learns for the *pleasure of learning*, as a dilettante, for himself, who assimilates knowledge well, has no difficulties, but keeps his knowledge to himself alone. He accords primary importance to himself, to his thought.

The idealist is closed to the external world, to reality. The materialist is always *open* to reality; that is why those who take courses in Marxism and who learn easily must try to *transmit* what they have learnt.

3. He who reasons on all things *in relation to himself* suffers an idealist distortion.

He will say, for example, of a meeting where things disagreeable have been said, "That was a bad meet-

ing." That is not the way things must be analysed; the meeting should be judged in reference to the organisation, to its aims, and not in reference to himself.

4. *Sectarianism* is not a materialist attitude either. Because the sectarian has understood the problems, because he is in accord with himself, he claims that the others should be like him. This again is giving primary importance to oneself or to a sect.

5. *The doctrinaire* who has studied the texts, has gathered definitions from them, again is an idealist when he quotes from materialist texts, if he lives only with his texts, for then the real world disappears. He repeats these formulas without applying them in action to reality. He gives primary importance to texts, to ideas. Life unfolds in his consciousness in the shape of texts, and in general, one observes that the doctrinaire is also sectarian.

Believing that the revolution is a question of education, saying that explaining its necessity to the workers "once and for all" should make them understand and that if they do not want to understand it, it is not worth the trouble to attempt to achieve the revolution, there you have sectarianism and not a materialist attitude.

We must take notice of the cases in which the people do not understand, we must investigate why it is so, observe the repression, the propaganda of the bourgeois newspapers, radio, cinema, etc., and seek all possible means to spread an understanding of what we want, by leaflets, pamphlets, newspapers, schools, etc.

To be without a sense of reality, to live in the moon, and, in practice, to form projects without taking any account of the circumstances, of realities, is an idealist attitude, which accords primary importance to fine projects without seeing if they are realisable or not. Those who criticise continually, but who do nothing that things may go better, not proposing any

remedy, those who lack a critical attitude towards themselves, all these are not consistent materialists.

#### 4. Conclusion.

By these examples, we see that the defects which can be observed more or less in each of us, are idealist defects. We suffer from them because we separate practice from theory, because the bourgeoisie delights in our not attaching importance to reality. For the bourgeoisie, who support idealism, theory and practice are two totally different things, quite unrelated. These defects, then, are harmful and we must fight them, for in the final reckoning they are profitable to the bourgeoisie. In short, we must take note that these defects, bred in us by society, by the theoretical bases of our education, of our culture, implanted in our childhood, are the work of the bourgeoisie and we must rid ourselves of them.

### CHAPTER III.

## HISTORY OF MATERIALISM

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1. The necessity of studying this History.
2. Pre-Marxist Materialism.
  - (i) Grecian antiquity.
  - (ii) English materialism.
  - (iii) Materialism in France.
  - (iv) 18th century materialism.
3. Where does Idealism come from?
4. Where does Religion come from?
5. The merits of materialism.
6. The defects of pre-Marxist materialism.

Up to this point we have studied what materialism is in general, and what ideas are common to *all* materialists. Now we are going to see how it evolved since antiquity, to result in modern materialism. In short we will cover rapidly the *history of materialism*. We do not claim in so few pages to explain the 2,000 years of materialism's history; we want merely to give some general indications which will guide your reading.

To study this history well, even if in summary fashion, it is indispensable to see at each moment *why* things have unfolded as they did. It would be better not to cite certain historic names, than leave this method unapplied. However, while we do not want to overburden the minds of our readers, we consider

that it is necessary to name in their historic order the principal materialist philosophers who are more or less known to them. That is why, to simplify the work, we are going to devote the first pages to the purely historic side, then, in the second part of the chapter, we will see why the evolution of materialism *had* to undergo the form of development that it has known.

## 1. The necessity of studying this History

The bourgeoisie does not like the history of materialism, and that is why this history, as taught in bourgeois books, is quite incomplete and always false. Various methods of falsification are used:

1. Unable to ignore the great materialist thinkers, they name them and speak of all that they have written, *except* their materialist studies, and they forget to say that they are materialist philosophers. There are many of these cases of "*forgetfulness*" in the history of philosophy as it is taught in the high schools or at the university, and we will cite as an example Diderot who was the greatest material thinker before Marx and Engels.

2. There have been, in the course of history, numerous thinkers who were unconscious or inconsistent materialists; that is to say, who were materialists in certain writings, but in others, idealists: Descartes, for example.

Now history written by the bourgeoisie leaves in the dark everything in the works of these thinkers which had not only influenced materialism, but also given birth to an entire current of this philosophy.

3. Then, if these two methods of falsification do not succeed in camouflaging certain authors, they purely and simply make away with them.

Thus it is that the history of the literature and philosophy of the 18th century is taught, and d'Holbach and Helvetius, great thinkers of that epoch, simply ignored.

Why is it so? Because the history of materialism is particularly instructive if you want to know and understand the problems of the world, and also because the development of materialism is deadly to the ideologies which support the privileges of the ruling classes. These are the reasons why the bourgeoisie presents materialism as a doctrine that has not changed, that was fixed twenty centuries ago, while, on the contrary, materialism has always been a living, moving thing.

"But just as idealism underwent a series of stages of development so also did materialism. With each epoch-making discovery even in the sphere of natural science it has to change its form." (Engels, *Feuerbach*.)

Now we understand better the necessity for studying, even summarily, the history of materialism. To do this, we will have to distinguish two periods:

1. From the origin (Grecian antiquity) up to Marx and Engels.

2. From the materialism of Marx and Engels to our day. (We will study this second part along with dialectical materialism.)

We call the first period "pre-Marxist materialism," and the second "Marxist materialism" or "Dialectical materialism."

## 2. Pre-Marxist Materialism

### 1. Grecian Antiquity.

Remember that materialism is a doctrine which has always been bound up with the sciences. Which has evolved and advanced with the sciences. When in ancient Greece, in the 6th and 5th centuries before our era, 2,500 years ago, science began to show itself

with the "physicians," there formed at that moment a materialist current which attracted the best thinkers and philosophers of that age (Thales, Anaximenes, Heraclitus). These first philosophers were, as Engels said, "Naturally dialecticians." They were struck by the fact that movement and change are to be found everywhere, and that things are not isolated but intimately bound up with one another.

Heraclitus, who is called the "father of dialectics," said:

"Nothing is motionless, everything flows; one never bathes twice in the same stream, for it is never, for two succeeding instants, the same. From one instant to the other it has changed; it has become different."

Heraclitus was the first who sought to explain motion and change and to see in contradictions the reason for the evolution of things. The concepts of these first philosophers were correct, and yet they were abandoned because they had the ill-fortune to be formulated a priori, that is to say that the state of the sciences of that age did not allow what they advanced to be proved.

It was only much later, in the 19th century, that social and intellectual conditions permitted the sciences to prove the correctness of dialectics.

Some other Greek thinkers had materialist conceptions: Leucippus (5th century B.C.), who was the teacher of Democritus, had already discussed the problem of the atoms, the theory of which we have already seen to have been established by Democritus.

Epicurus (341-270 B.C.), a disciple of Democritus, has been completely misrepresented by bourgeois history, which pictures him as a vulgar "philosophic pig," for to be an Epicurean, according to the official history, means to be a bon vivant, while, on the contrary, Epicurus was an ascetic in his life. His bad reputation is simply due to the fact that he was a materialist.

Lucretius (the 1st century B.C.), a disciple of Epicurus, wrote a long poem on Nature. In it he says that humanity is wretched because religion has taught men that after death the soul still lives and that it may suffer eternally. It is, then, this fear that prevents men being happy on earth. This terror must be removed, and the only theory capable of succeeding in that is Epicurean materialism.

All these philosophers were conscious that this theory was bound up with the fate of humanity and we observe already on their part opposition to the official theory; opposition between materialism and idealism.

But one great thinker dominates Grecian antiquity; that is Aristotle, who was an idealist philosopher. His influence was considerable; and that is why we must cite him particularly. He made an inventory of all human knowledge of that epoch, filled the gaps created by the new sciences. A universal mind, he wrote numerous books on all subjects. Through the universality of his knowledge, he had a considerable influence on philosophic ideas till the end of the middle ages, that is to say for twenty centuries.

During the whole of this period, the ancient tradition was followed and no one thought except through Aristotle. A savage repression raged against all who thought otherwise. Despite it all, towards the end of the middle ages, a struggle began between the idealists who denied the existence of matter and those who thought that a material reality did exist. In the 11th and 12th centuries this dispute went on both in France and above all in England. At the beginning it was in the latter country that materialism developed. Marx has said, "Materialism is the true son of Great Britain." (Marx, "The Holy Family.")

A little later, it was in France that materialism blossomed. In any case we see two trends manifest

themselves in the 15th and 16th centuries: one, English materialism, the other French materialism, and the meeting of these contributed to the prodigious blossoming of materialism in the 18th century.

## 2. *English Materialism.*

"The true ancestor of English materialism and of all modern experimental science is Bacon. In his eyes the physical and natural sciences constitute the true science and of this, concrete physics is the principal part." (Marx, *The Holy Family*.)

Bacon is famous as the founder of the experimental method in the study of science. For him, the main thing is to study science in the "great book of nature" and that is particularly extraordinary in an age where science was studied in the *books* that Aristotle had left many centuries before.

To study physics, for example, this is how they used to proceed: On the particular subject, they took the passages written by Aristotle; next they took the books of St. Thomas Aquinas, who was a great theologian, and read what he had written on Aristotle's passages. The professor made no personal commentary, still less did he say what he thought about it, but referred to a third work which was a mere repetition of Aristotle and Aquinas. There you have the science of the middle ages, which is termed *scholastic*; it was a bookish science for they only studied books.

It is against this that Bacon reacted and advocated study in the "great book of nature."

At this time, a question arose: Where do our ideas come from? Where does our knowledge come from? Each of us has ideas, the idea of houses, for example. This idea comes to us because there are houses, say the materialists. The idealists think that it is God who gives us the idea of houses. Bacon himself said

indeed that the idea only existed because one touches and sees things, but he could not yet prove it.

It was Locke (1632-1704) who undertook to demonstrate how ideas arise from experience. He showed that all ideas come from experience, and only experience gives us ideas. The idea of the first table came to man before a table existed, because by experience he was already using the trunk of a tree or a stone as a table.

With the ideas of Locke, English materialism passes into France in the first half of the 18th century because, while this philosophy was developing in a special mode in England, a materialist current was forming in France.

## 3. *Materialism in France.*

Beginning with Descartes (1596-1650) a clearly materialist trend arose in France. Descartes had a great influence over this philosophy, but in general this is not mentioned.

At this time when feudal ideology was very much alive even in the sciences, when people studied in the way we have already described, Descartes began a struggle against this state of affairs.

Feudal ideology implies that there are two kinds of people, to wit, the nobility and the others.

The nobles possess all rights, the others none. The same with science, that is to say, only those who, by right of birth, occupied a privileged position, had the right to busy themselves with science. They alone were capable of understanding its problems.

Descartes fought against this assumption and said on this subject, "Intelligence is the most widely shared thing in the world." Consequently, everyone has the same rights with regard to science. He ably criticised the medicine of his time (the "Imaginary Invalid" of

Moliere is an echo of Descartes' criticisms). He wanted to build a science that would be really science, based on the study of nature, and rejecting that science previously taught in which Aristotle and Aquinas were the only "arguments."

Descartes lived at the beginning of the 17th century; the next century saw the Revolution, and that is why one can say of him that he arose from a world about to disappear, to enter into a new world, one about to be born. This position resulted in Descartes being a conciliator; he wanted to create a materialist science and at the same time he was an idealist, for he wanted to save religion.

When, in his time, it was asked: "Why are there animals who live?" the ready made answers of theology were given: "Because there is a principle which makes them live." Descartes, on the contrary, maintained that if animals live, it is because they *are* matter. Moreover, he believed and asserted that animals are but machines of flesh and sinews, as other machines are of iron and wood. He even thought that neither machine had feeling; and when at the Abbey Port Royal, during weeks of study, adherents of his philosophy were sticking needles into some dogs, they said, "How well nature is made. You would think they are suffering!"

For Descartes, then, the animals were machines. "But *man* is different because he has a soul," said Descartes. From ideas developed and defended by Descartes were born on the one hand a frankly materialist philosophic trend, and on the other an idealist trend.

Among those who continue the cartesian materialist branch, we must remember La Mettrie (1709-1751). Resuming the thesis of the "animal-machine," he extends it to man. Why should he not be a machine?

The human soul itself, he sees too as a mechanism in which the ideas are mechanical movements.

It is at this time that English materialism penetrates into France, with the ideas of Locke. From the union of these trends a more developed materialism will be born. That is:

#### 4. 18th Century Materialism.

This materialism was defended by philosophers who also knew how to be fighters and admirable writers; continually criticising social institutions and religion, applying theory to practice and always in struggle against the powers-that-be, they were sometimes jailed in the Bastille.

It was they who worked together on the great Encyclopedia, in which they set out the new orientation of materialism. Moreover, they had great influence, since this philosophy was, as Engels said, "firmly held by all cultivated youth."

This was the only period in the history of philosophy in France in which a definitely French philosophy became truly popular.

Diderot, born at Langres in 1713, who died in Paris in 1784, dominates this whole movement. What bourgeois history does not say, is that he was, before Marx and Engels, the greatest materialist thinker. Diderot, Lenin said, *almost* arrives at the conclusions of contemporary (dialectical) materialism.

He was a real fighter; always in battle against the Church, against the state of society; he got to know what it was like in jail. Bourgeois history has largely overlooked him. But the *Conversations of Diderot and D'Alembert*, the *Nephew of Rameau*, *Jacques the Fatalist*, must be read if you wish to understand Diderot's enormous influence on materialism.

In the first half of the 19th century, because of events, materialism suffered a setback. The bourgeoisie of every country produced a lot of propaganda in favour of idealism and of religion.

It was then that Feuerbach in Germany proclaimed amidst all the idealist philosophers his materialist convictions, "by again replacing materialism squarely on the throne." (Engels, *Feuerbach*.)

It was not that he brought something new to materialism, but that he restated in a sane and modern fashion the bases of materialism which had been forgotten, and so influenced the philosophers of his time.

Now we come to that period of the 19th century in which there is seen a tremendous advance in the sciences, particularly to three great discoveries—the cell, the transformation of energy and evolution (of Darwin), which were to permit Marx and Engels, influenced by Feuerbach, to develop materialism and give us modern or dialectical materialism.

We have just seen, very briefly, the history of materialism before Marx and Engels. We know that they, while they agreed with the materialists who preceded them on many points common to all, came to the conclusion that the work of their predecessors on the other hand had many faults and omissions.

To understand the transformation they brought to pre-Marxist materialism, it is absolutely necessary to find out what these faults and omission were, and the reasons for them. Consequently, it is indispensable to study materialism as it existed before Marx and Engels.

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In other words, the study of the history of materialism would be incomplete if, after having enumerated the various thinkers who contributed to the progress

of materialism, we did not seek to find out how and in what direction this progress was made and why it evolved in the way it did.

We will devote special attention to the 18th century materialism, because it was the culmination of various trends in this philosophy.

We are going, then, to study what were the errors of this materialism, what were its omissions, but as we must never see things in a one-sided manner, but on the contrary as a whole, we will also emphasise its merits.

Materialism, which was dialectical in the beginning, could not continue to develop on that basis. Dialectical reasoning, on account of the lack of scientific knowledge, had to be abandoned. It was necessary first to create and develop the sciences. "It was necessary first to examine things before it was possible to examine processes." (Engels, *Feuerbach*.)

It was, then, the very close unity of materialism and science which was to permit this philosophy to become again, on more solid and more scientific foundations, Dialectical materialism, that of Marx and Engels.

We find again therefore the birth of materialism beside that of science. If however we discover again where materialism comes from, we must establish also whence comes idealism.

### 3. Where does Idealism come from?

If, in the course of the history of this philosophy, idealism was able to exist by the side of religion, it is because it was born and arose from religion.

On this subject Lenin wrote a formula which we should study. "Idealism is a refined and simple form of religion." What does that mean? This—that idealism knows how to present its concepts in a much

more subtle manner than religion. To claim that the universe was created by a spirit which floated above the darkness, that God is not material, then declare that he speaks, speak to us of his body, there you have a series of ideas presented crudely. Idealism, declaring that the world exists only in our thinking, in our mind, presents itself in a more hidden manner. At bottom, as we know, it comes to the same thing, but it is less crude, more elegant in form. That is why idealism is a refined form of religion.

It is also subtle because idealist philosophers in debate know how to foresee questions, to set traps, as Philonous did to poor Hylas in Berkeley's dialogues. But saying that idealism arises from religion is merely evading the problem, and we must consider

#### 4. Where does Religion come from?

On this subject Engels gave a very clear answer. "Religion is born from man's narrow ideas." (Narrow is taken here in the sense of limited.)

For primitive men, this ignorance was twofold; ignorance of nature, ignorance of themselves. This twofold ignorance must be constantly kept in mind when the history of primitive man is studied.

In ancient Greece, which we nevertheless deem a civilisation already quite advanced, this ignorance appears childish to us, for example when we see that Aristotle thought that the earth was immobile, that it was the centre of the universe, and the planets revolved round it. (These latter, of which he saw forty-six, were fixed like nails on a ceiling, and it was the whole set-up that turned round the earth.)

The Greeks also thought that there were four elements: water, earth, air and fire, which could not be broken up into other elements. We now know that all that is wrong, since we do now break up water,

earth and air into other elements, and we do not consider fire as a thing of the same order.

On man himself, the Greeks were also very ignorant since they did not know the functions of our organs; for example, they considered that the brain played a part in digestion!

If the ignorance of the Greek scholars was so great, scholars whom we deem already very advanced, what must have been the ignorance then of the men who lived thousands of years before them? The ideas that the primitive men had of nature and of themselves were limited by ignorance. These men, however, attempted in spite of everything to explain things. All the documents that we have on primitive man tell us that he was very preoccupied with dreams. We have already seen, in the first chapter, how they solved this question of dreams by belief in the existence of a "double" of the man. At the beginning, they attributed to this double a sort of transparent, light body, but still of material substance. It is only much later that there was to be born in their minds the idea that man has within him an immaterial principle which survives after death, a spiritual principle (spiritual comes from spirit, which in Latin signifies breath, the breath that departs with the last sigh, at the moment when one gives up the soul and when only the "double" survives.) It is, then, the *soul* which explains thought and dream.

In the middle ages, there were bizarre ideas about the soul. It was thought that in a fat body there was a thin soul, and in a thin body a large soul; that is why, in that age, ascetics made long and numerous fasts in order to have a big soul, in order to make a spacious lodging for the soul.

Having admitted, in the shape of the transparent double, then in the shape of the soul, the spiritual

principle, the survival of man after death, primitive man created the gods.

Believing at first in beings more powerful than men, existing in a form still material, they gradually came to the belief in gods existing in the form of a soul superior to ours. And so it is that after having created a multitude of gods, each having a definite function, as in ancient Greece, they came from that to the idea of one God only. Then the present monotheistic religion was created. So we see that ignorance was at the origin of religion, even in its present form.

Idealism therefore is born from the limited concepts of man, from his ignorance; while materialism, on the contrary, is born from the pushing back of these limits.

In the course of the history of philosophy, we witness this continual struggle between idealism and materialism. The latter wants to make the boundaries of ignorance recede, and that is and will be one of its glories and its merits.

## 5. The merits of Materialism

We have seen materialism born with the Greeks as soon as an embryo of science existed. Following the principle that when science develops, materialism develops, we observe in the course of history:

1. In the middle ages, a weak development of the sciences, a setback to materialism.
2. In the 17th and 18th centuries, to a very great development of science corresponds a great development of materialism. The French materialism of the 18th century is the direct result of the development of the sciences.
3. In the 19th century, we see many and great discoveries, and materialism undergoes a great

transformation at the hands of Marx and Engels.

4. To-day the sciences progress enormously and at the same time, so does materialism. One sees the best scientists apply dialectical materialism in their studies.

Idealism and materialism have therefore quite opposite origins and we observe, in the course of the centuries, a struggle between the two philosophies, a struggle which still endures in our days, and which was not merely academic.

This struggle, which runs through mankind's history, is the struggle between science and ignorance, it is a battle between two trends. One draws humanity towards ignorance and keeps it in that ignorance; the other, on the contrary, works for the liberation of man through replacing ignorance by science.

This struggle has taken grave forms sometimes, as in the time of the Inquisition when we can take the example, amongst others, of Galileo. He asserted that the world revolves. You have there a new piece of knowledge which is in contradiction with the Bible and also with Aristotle; if the earth revolves, it means that it is not the centre of the universe, but simply a point in the universe, and hence we must widen the bounds of our thoughts.

What then was done in the face of this discovery of Galileo's? To keep mankind in ignorance, a religious tribunal was set up, and Galileo condemned to torture and to recant. There you have an example of the struggle between ignorance and science.

We must therefore judge the philosophers and the scientists of that age by finding where they stood in this battle of ignorance against science, and we will observe that in defending science, they defend materialism unknowingly. Thus Descartes by his reason-

ing furnished ideas which were able to make materialism advance.

It must indeed be seen also that this struggle in the course of history is not simply a theoretical battle, but also a social and political contest. In this battle the ruling classes are always on the side of ignorance. Science is revolutionary and contributes to the liberation of mankind.

The case of the bourgeoisie is typical. In the 18th century, the bourgeoisie was dominated by the feudal class; at that particular moment, the bourgeoisie were for science, and waged the struggle against ignorance which gave us the Encyclopedia. In the 20th century, the bourgeoisie is the dominant class, and in this struggle between ignorance and science, *they were for ignorance* with a much greater savagery than was ever seen before. (As with Hitlerism.)

We see then that pre-Marxist materialism played a considerable role and had very great historical importance. In the course of the struggle between ignorance and science it was able to develop a general conception of the world which could be opposed to religion and accordingly to ignorance. It is thanks also to the evolution of materialism, to its successive labours, that the conditions indispensable for the flowering of dialectical materialism were established.

## 6. The defects of pre-Marxist Materialism

In order to understand the evolution of materialism, to appreciate its defects and omissions, it must never be forgotten that science and materialism are bound up together.

At the beginning, materialism was ahead of science, and that is why this philosophy was unable to assert itself from the outset. It was necessary to create and develop the sciences before dialectical materialism

could be proved to be right, but that required more than 2,000 years. During this lengthy period, materialism has undergone the influence of the sciences and particularly the influence of the spirit of science; as also that of the particular sciences that were most developed.

That is why . . .

"The materialism of the last century (18th) was predominantly mechanical, because at that time, of all natural sciences, only mechanics, and indeed only the mechanics of solid bodies—celestial and terrestrial—in short, the mechanics of gravity, had come to any definite close. Chemistry at that time existed only in its infantile, phlogistic form. Biology still lay in its swaddling clothes; vegetable and animal organisms had only been roughly examined and were explained as the result of purely mechanical causes. What the animal was to Descartes, man was to the materialists of the eighteenth century — a machine." (F. Engels, *Feuerbach*.)

There then you have materialism as it was when it emerged from a long and slow development of the sciences after "hibernation in the Christian Middle Ages."

The great mistake made in the 18th century was that of deeming the world to be a great machine, judging everything according to the rules of that science which is termed mechanics. Considering evolution as a simple mechanical movement, it was estimated that the same events should be continually reproduced. They saw the machine side of things but they did not see the *living* side. Therefore this materialism is called mechanical.

Let us have an example: How did these materialists explain thought? In this way: "The brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile." Marxist materialism, on the contrary, gives a series of specifications. Our thoughts do not arise solely from the brain. It is necessary to know why we have certain thoughts,

certain ideas, rather than other thoughts and ideas, and it is found that society, environment, etc., make the selection. Mechanical materialism looks on the brain as a mere mechanical phenomenon. But "this exclusive application of the standards of mechanics to processes of a chemical and organic nature—in which processes the laws of mechanics are, indeed, also valid, but are pushed into the background by other higher laws—constitutes the first specific, but at that time inevitable limitation of classical French materialism."

That was the first great fault of 18th century materialism.

The results of this error were that materialism was ignorant of history in general, that is, of the idea of historical development, of the process. This materialism considered that the world does not evolve and that it returns to similar states; neither did it conceive of any evolution in man or in animals.

"This materialism in its inability to comprehend the universe as a process, as matter undergoing uninterrupted historical development . . . was in accordance with the level of the natural science of that time, and with the metaphysical, i.e., anti-dialectical manner of philosophising connected with it. Nature, it was known, was in eternal motion. But, according to the ideas of that time, this motion turned, also eternally, in a circle and therefore never moved from the spot; it produced the same results over and over again." (F. Engels, *Feuerbach*.)

That is the second fault of this materialism.

Its third error is that it was too contemplative; it did not sufficiently appreciate the role of human *action* in the world and in society.

Marxist materialism teaches that we must not only *explain* the world, we must *change* it. Historically, man is an active element who can bring changes to the world. The actions of the Russian Communists are living examples of actions capable not only of preparing, carrying out, and winning the revolution,

but also since 1918 of building socialism in the midst of enormous difficulties.

Pre-Marxist materialism was not conscious of this concept of man's activity. In that age they thought that man is a product of his environment. Marx teaches us that the environment is produced by man and that man is therefore a product of himself. While man is influenced by the environment, he can change the environment, the social order; consequently he can change himself.

The materialism of the 18th century was then too contemplative because it ignored the historical development of everything, and that was inevitable since scientific knowledge was not sufficiently advanced to conceive the world and things otherwise than through the old method of thought: "Metaphysics."

### READING

Marx and Engels: *The Holy Family*.

Engels: *Ludwig Feuerbach*.

Lenin: *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. Chapter 6.

### QUESTIONS

CHAPTER I.: How could Pasteur be at once a scientist and a believer?

CHAPTER II.: Show how the study of books is both necessary and insufficient.

CHAPTER III.: (1) Why did dialectical materialism not arise in ancient times? (2) Indicate the principal materialist trends from ancient Greece down to 18th century. (3) What are the merits and the errors of the 18th century materialists?

### WRITTEN EXERCISE

1. Write a dialogue on God between an idealist and a materialist.

PART III.

STUDY OF METAPHYSICS

CHAPTER I.  
OF WHAT DOES THE  
'METAPHYSICAL METHOD'  
CONSIST?

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1. The characteristics of this method:
  - (a) First characteristic: The principle of identity.
  - (b) Second characteristic: Isolation of things.
  - (c) Third characteristic: Eternal and insurmountable divisions.
  - (d) Fourth characteristic: Opposition of Contraries.
2. Summing up.
3. The metaphysical conception of Nature.
4. The metaphysical conception of Society.
5. The metaphysical conception of Thought.
6. What is logic?
7. The explanation of the word "Metaphysics."

We know that the defects of the 18th century materialists arose from their form of reasoning, from their particular method of research which we have termed "metaphysical method." The metaphysical method, then, reveals a particular conception of the world and we should note that if to the pre-Marxist materialism we oppose Marxist materialism, in the same way to metaphysical materialism we oppose dialectical materialism.

That is why, unaware as yet of what we mean by metaphysics, we are going to find out by studying the method itself in order to examine next what, on the contrary, the dialectical method is.

## 1. The characteristics of this method.

What we are going to study now is "that old method of investigation and thought which Hegel calls metaphysical." (F. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*.)

Let us begin immediately by noting one thing. Which seems more natural to the majority of people, motion or immobility? Which is, for them, the normal state of things, rest or movement?

It is generally thought that rest existed before motion, and that, for anything to begin to move, it would at first have to be in a state of rest. Also the Bible says that before the world which was created by God, there existed motionless eternity, that is to say, rest.

These words, rest and immobility, we will often use: as also, motion and change. Note that these last two words are not synonyms. Motion, in the strict sense of the word, means changing place. For example, a falling stone, a train proceeding from one station to another, are in motion. Change, in the proper sense of the word, means the passing from one *form* to another. For example: The tree which loses its leaves, has changed its form; but it means also passing from one *state* to another. For example: the air has become unbreathable—that is a change.

Motion, then, signifies changing place, and change means changing form or state. We will try to respect this distinction in order to avoid confusion, but when we study dialectics we will have to review the meaning of these words.

We have just seen that, speaking generally, it is considered that motion and change are less *normal* than rest, and it is certain that we have a kind of preference for thinking of things at rest and not changing.

For example: We buy a pair of tan shoes, and after a certain time, after many repairs, several new soles and heels, even perhaps some patching, we still say, "I am going to put on my tan shoes", without taking account that they are no longer the same. For us they are always the tan shoes we bought on a certain occasion and for which we paid a certain price. We do not consider the change that has taken place in our shoes, they are still the same, they are *identical*. We neglect the change to see only the identity, as if nothing important had happened. There you have the

*First characteristic: The principle of identity.*

It consists in preferring immobility to motion, and identity to change, with respect to events. From this preference, which constitutes the primary character of this method, there flows a complete conception of the world. The universe is considered as if it were fixed, as Engels says. It is the same for Nature, Society and Man. Thus it is often said, "There is nothing new under the sun," which means to say that since the beginning of time there has been no change; the world has remained motionless. Often also, this saying means a periodical return to the same happenings. God created the world, the fish, birds, mammals, etc. And nothing since has changed, the world has not stirred. It is also said, "Men are always the same," as if men from all time had not altered.

These current sayings reflect this conception which is deeply rooted in us, in our minds, and the bourgeoisie exploits this error to the limit.

When Socialism is criticised, one of the favourite arguments is that man *is* selfish and that it is necessary there should be a force to restrain him, or disorder would reign. There you have the result of the metaphysical conception which will have it that man has forever a set nature that cannot change.

It is indeed certain that if we were suddenly to have the chance of living in a Communist regime, that is to say, that if immediately goods could be distributed to each according to his needs and not according to his work, there would be a wild rush to satisfy capricious desires, and such a society could not stand. And yet that is what Communist society is like, and that is the rational thing. But it is because there is a metaphysical conception deeply rooted within us, that we picture the future man, who will live in a distant future, as similar to the man of to-day. Consequently, when it is asserted that a socialist or communist society would not be viable because man *is* selfish, it is forgotten that if society changes, man also will change.

Every day one hears criticisms about the Soviet Union which demonstrate the difficulty of their formulators in really understanding, owing to a metaphysical conception of the world and things in general.

From the numerous examples that we could cite, let us take only this: It is said, "In the Soviet Union a worker receives a wage which does not equal the total value of his product, there is therefore surplus value, that is to say, a deduction from his wage. Therefore he is robbed. In France it is the same, the workers are exploited. There is therefore no difference between a Soviet and a French worker."

In this example, where is the metaphysical conception? It consists in not considering that there are, in this case, two types of society and in not taking account of the differences between the two societies;

in believing that if there is surplus value here and yonder, it amounts to the same thing, without considering the changes that have been made in the U.S.S.R., where man and machine no longer bear the same economic and social meaning as in France. Now in our country, the machine exists to produce, and the man to be exploited. In the U.S.S.R., both exist in order to produce. The surplus value in France goes to the employer; in the U.S.S.R. to the State—that is to say, to the classless collectivity.

We see then, from this example, that defects in judgment originate in those who are sincere, from a metaphysical method of thought, and particularly from the application of the primary characteristic of this method, its fundamental characteristic, which consists in underestimating change, and considering for preference, immobility; or, in a word, that which, during change, tends to perpetuate identity.

Now what is this identity? For example, we have seen a house built which was finished January 1, 1935. When shall we say that it is identical? On January 1st, 1936, and all the subsequent years, because it still has two storeys, twenty windows, two doors on the front, etc., etc., because it always stays the same, does not alter, and is no different. Being identical, then, means to remain the same, not to become different.

Now what are the practical consequences of the first characteristic of the metaphysical method?

As we prefer to see identity in things, that is to say, to see them remaining themselves, we say, for example, "Life is life, and death is death." We assert that life remains life and death remains itself, death, and that is all.

Becoming used to considering things in their identity, we separate them from each other. To say, "A chair

is "a chair" is a natural observation; still, it implies putting the emphasis on identity, and that means to say at the same time: "That which is not a chair is something else."

It is so natural to say that, that it appears childish to draw attention specially to it. In the same order of ideas we say: "The horse is the horse and what is not the horse is something else." So then we separate the chair on one side, on the other the horse; and so we do for everything. Thus we draw distinctions, separating things strictly, the one from the other, and so we are led to transforming the world into a collection of separate things, and there you have the:

*Second characteristic: Isolation of things.*

What we have just said seems so ordinary that it can be asked "Why say it?" We are going to see that in spite of everything, that was necessary, for this system of reasoning leads us to see things from a certain angle.

Once more it is by its practical consequences that we are going to judge the second characteristic of this method.

In ordinary life, if we consider the animals, and reason with regard to them by separating them, we do not see what there is in common between those of different species and genera. A horse is a horse and a cow a cow. There is no relation between them.

That is the point of view of old-fashioned zoology, which classed the animals, sharply separating one from the other, and seeing no relation between them. That is one of the results of the use of the metaphysical method.

As another example, we could cite the fact that the bourgeoisie want science to be science; want philosophy to remain itself; the same for politics; and be it under-

stood there is nothing in common, absolutely no relation between the three.

The practical conclusion drawn from such reasoning is that a scientist should remain a scientist and must not mix his science with philosophy and politics. It is the same for a philosopher and for the member of a political party.

When a man of good faith reasons thus, one can say that he reasons as a metaphysician. The author, H. G. Wells, went to the Soviet Union some years ago and paid a visit to Maxim Gorky the great writer, now dead. He proposed to him the formation of a literary club in which politics would not be dealt with; for in his mind, literature is literature and politics, politics. Gorky and his friends, it seems, began to laugh, and Wells was vexed. You see, Wells saw and conceived authors as living *outside* of society, whilst Gorky and his friends knew well that it is not so in life.

In ordinary practice, we endeavour to classify, to isolate things, to see them and to study them purely for themselves. Those who are not Marxists see the State, in general, in isolation from Society, as independent of the form of Society. Reasoning thus, isolating the State from reality, means to isolate it from its relation with Society.

There is the same error when man is spoken of in isolation from other men, from his environment, from society. If one also thinks of the machine for itself, isolating it from the society in which it produces, one commits this error in thinking, "Machine in Paris, machine in Moscow; surplus value here and there; there is no difference. It is absolutely the same thing."

We read this sort of thing continually and accept it because the general, habitual point of view is to

isolate, to separate things. That is a characteristic habit of metaphysical method.

*Third Characteristic: Eternal and insurmountable divisions.*

After having given our preference to considering things as immobile and unchanging, we have classified and catalogued them, thus creating between them divisions which make us forget the relations that they may have one with another.

This fashion of seeing and judging brings us to believe that these divisions exist once for all (a horse IS A HORSE) and that they are *absolute, insurmountable and eternal*. There is the third characteristic of the metaphysical method.

But we must be careful when we speak of this method; for when we Marxists say that in capitalist society there are two classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, we also make divisions that seem to be related to the metaphysical point of view. Only, it is not merely by introducing divisions that one is a metaphysician; it is by the manner, the fashion in which one establishes the differences and the relations between the divisions.

For example, the bourgeoisie, when we say there are two classes in society, think immediately that there are rich and poor. And, of course, they will tell us "There have *always* been rich and poor." "There have always been" and "There will always be." There you have a metaphysical style of reasoning. Things are *for ever* divided into classes independent of each other and impassable walls are established between them.

They divide society into rich and poor instead of observing the existence of the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat, and even if they admit the latter division, they consider them apart from their mutual relations;

that is to say, outside the class struggle. What are the practical consequences of this third characteristic which establishes definite barriers between things? It is that between a horse and a cow there can be no bond of relationship. It is the same for all the sciences and for all things that surround us. Further on we will see whether that is correct, but now it remains for us to examine the result of the three different characteristics that we have just described, and that is the

*Fourth Characteristic: Opposition of Contraries*

It follows from what we have just seen, that when we say, "Life is life; and death is death," we assert that life and death have nothing in common. We class them well apart, seeing life and death each in itself, without seeing the relations that can exist between them. Under these conditions a man who has just lost his life must be considered a dead thing, for it is impossible that he should be living and dead at the same time, since life and death are mutually exclusive.

By considering things in isolation, different from one another, we come to oppose them one to another. Here we are at the fourth characteristic of metaphysical method, which opposes contraries, one to the other, and asserts that two contrary things cannot exist at the same time. In effect, in the example of life and death, there could not be a third possibility. We *must* choose one or other of the classifications that we have made. We consider that a third possibility would be a *contradiction*, that this contradiction is an absurdity, and consequently, an impossibility.

The fourth characteristic of the metaphysical method is the horror of contradiction.

The practical consequence of this reasoning is that when one, for example, speaks of democracy and dictatorship, well, the metaphysical point of view demands

that society choose between the two; because democracy is democracy and dictatorship is dictatorship. Democracy is not dictatorship; and dictatorship is not democracy. We must choose, or we are faced with a contradiction, an absurdity, an impossibility.

*The Marxist Attitude is Quite Different.*

We Marxists, consider, on the contrary, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is at one and the same time the dictatorship by the mass, and democracy for the masses of the exploited.

We think that the life of living things is only possible because there is a perpetual struggle between the cells, and that continually some are dying, to be replaced by others. Thus life contains something of death in itself. We think that death is not as total and separated from life as metaphysics consider, because in a corpse all life has not completely disappeared since certain cells continue to live for a certain time, and even from the corpse other lives will be born.

## 2. Summing up

As we see, the various characteristics of the metaphysical method oblige us to consider things from a certain angle and lead us to reason in a certain manner. We observe that this mode of analysis possesses a certain "logic" which we will study later, and we also observe that it corresponds very closely to a way of thinking, seeing, studying and analysing that is generally met with.

People begin—and this enumeration allows us to summarise the above—by:—

1. Seeing things in their immobility, in their identity.
2. Separating things, the ones from the others; detaching them from their mutual relations.

3. Establishing between things eternal divisions and impassable walls.
4. Opposing contraries by asserting that two contrary things cannot exist at the same time.

We have also seen, after examining the practical consequences of each characteristic, that this does not correspond to reality.

Does the world conform to this conception? In nature, are things immobile and unchanging? Of course not; we see everything moving, everything changing. Therefore this conception is not in accord with things themselves. Evidently it is nature that is correct and it is this conception that is mistaken.

From the first we defined philosophy as wishing to explain the universe, man, nature, etc. The sciences study particular problems; philosophy is, we said, the study of the most general problems, in conjunction with and as an extension of the sciences.

That is why the old metaphysical method of thinking, which is applied to all problems, is also a philosophical conception which considers the universe, man and nature in a quite special manner:—

"To the metaphysician, things and their mental images, ideas, are isolated, to be considered one after the other apart from each other; rigid, fixed objects of investigation given once for all. He thinks in absolutely unrelated antitheses. His communication is 'Yea, yea; nay, nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.' For him a thing exists or it does not exist; it is equally impossible for a thing to be itself and at the same time something else. Positive and negative absolutely exclude one another; cause and effect stand in an equally rigid antithesis one to the other." (*Anti-Duhring*—F. Engels.)

The metaphysical conception, then, considers "the universe as an assembly of fixed things." In order to get a thorough grasp of this method of thinking, we are going to study how it conceives Nature, Society, and Thought.

### 3. The Metaphysical Conception of Nature

Metaphysics considers Nature as a whole composed of things that are definitely fixed. Now there are two modes of thus considering things. *The first mode* considers that the world is absolutely immobile, motion being only an illusion of our senses; if we take away this appearance of motion, Nature does not stir. This theory was defended by a school of Greek philosophers called Eleatics. This simplifying conception is in such violent contradiction with reality that it is no longer supported in our days.

*The second mode* of considering Nature as a conglomeration of fixed things is much more subtle. They do not say that Nature is motionless, but that it moves with a mechanical motion. Here the first mode disappears; motion is no longer denied, and the conception in appearance is not metaphysical. This conception is termed "mechanist" or "mechanism."

This is an error which is very often made, and we meet it again in the materialists of the 17th and 18th centuries. We saw that they did not consider Nature as immobile, but in motion; only for them this motion is simply a mechanical change, a change of place.

They accept the whole solar system (that the Earth moves round the Sun), but they consider that this movement is purely mechanical, that is to say, a pure change of place, and they consider this movement only under that aspect.

However, things are not so simple. If the earth merely revolves, that is certainly a mechanical movement, but while revolving, it can undergo certain influences—grow colder, for example.

So there is not merely a change of place; there are also other changes produced.

What, then, characterises this conception termed "mechanist" is that only the mechanical movement is considered.

If the Earth goes round the sun unceasingly and nothing else happens to it, the Earth *changes place*, but the Earth *itself* does not change; it remains identical with itself. It does nothing but continue, before we were and after we have gone, to revolve for ever and ever. Thus, everything goes on as if nothing had happened. We see, then, that to admit motion, but to make it purely mechanical movement, is a metaphysical conception, for this movement has *no history*.

A watch with perfect works, made of non-wearing materials, would go eternally without changing in any way, and the watch would have no history. It is such a conception of the Universe that is constantly met with in Descartes. He sought to reduce all physical and physiological laws to mechanics. He has no idea of chemistry (see his explanation of the circulation of the blood), and his mechanical conception of things was later on adopted by the 18th century materialists. (We must except Diderot, who is less purely mechanist and in some of his writings attains the dialectical conception.)

What characterises the 18th century materialists is that they made Nature a watch-works mechanism, and in their writings they constantly repeat this conception. If it were really thus, things would return continually to the same point without leaving a mark; Nature would remain identical with itself, which is, indeed, the first characteristic of the metaphysical method.

### 4. The Metaphysical Conception of Society

The metaphysical idea will have it that nothing changes in Society. But, generally, they do not claim

exactly that. They recognise some changes; as, for example, in production, when, commencing with raw materials, finished goods are produced, in politics when governments succeed each other. People recognise all that, but they deem the capitalist regime definitive and eternal, and even compare it sometimes to a machine. So it happens that they speak of the economic machine going off the rails at times, and having to be repaired in order to preserve it. This economic machine they desire to be able to continue distributing, like an automatic machine, dividends to some, poverty to the others.

They talk also of the political machine, by which they mean the bourgeois parliamentary regime, of which they ask only one thing; that is, to function, sometimes towards the right, sometimes towards the left, in order to preserve their privileges for the capitalists.

There you see, in this mode of considering Society, a mechanist, metaphysical conception.

If it were possible that this society, all its cogs working, should continue to work thus continually, it would leave no mark, and in consequence have no successor in history.

Also there exists a very important mechanist concept which applies to the whole universe, but above all to society, which consists of disseminating the idea of a regular march and a periodic return of the same events, under the formula "History continually repeats itself."

It must be observed that these ideas are very widespread. People do not deny motion and change, which do exist and are observable in Society, but they falsify the movement itself by transforming it into a simple mechanism.

## 5. The Metaphysical Conception of Thought

What is the conception of Thought that prevails around us? In general, our people believe that human thought was and is eternal. We believe that even if things have changed, our mode of reasoning is the same as that of the man who lived a century ago. As to our sentiments, they are generally deemed to be the same as those of the Greeks, kindness and love having always existed; thus it is that one speaks of "eternal love." The belief that human sentiments have not changed is very current.

That is why it is said, and written, for example, that Society can exist on no other basis than individual and selfish enrichment. That is why, also, one often hears it said that "the desires of men are ever the same."

We often think thus. Into the motion of thought as into all others, we allow the metaphysical conception to penetrate. That is because this method is to be found at the root of our education.

"At first sight, this mode of thought seems to us extremely plausible, because it is the mode of thought of so-called sound common sense." (F. Engels, *Anti-Duhring*.)

The consequence of this point of view, this metaphysical mode of thought, is that it becomes not only a conception of the world, but also a *mode of procedure in thinking*.

Now, if it is relatively easy to reject metaphysical reasoning, it is, on the other hand, more difficult to rid oneself of the metaphysical way of thinking. Now we must try and be a little more precise on this question. We term the manner in which we regard the Universe, a conception; and the way in which we look for explanations, a method.

Examples: (a) The changes that we see in Society are only appearance, they merely renew what has

previously existed. There you have a "conception."  
(b) When one investigates past events in the history of Society, in order to conclude "there is nothing new under the sun"—there you see the method.

And we observe that the *conception* inspires—determines the *method*.

We have now seen what the metaphysical conception is; next we will have a look at its method of investigation. It is called Logic.

## 6. What is Logic?

It is said of Logic that it is the art of thinking correctly. To think in conformity with the truth means to think according to the rules of logic, they say.

What are these rules? There are three great and principal rules.

1. *The principle of identity.* This is, as we have seen, the rule that will have it that a thing is identical with itself and does not change. (The horse is the horse.)

2. *The principle of non-contradiction.* A thing cannot be at the same time itself and its opposite. One must choose (Life cannot be life and death).

3. *The principle of the excluded middle.* Or exclusion of the third case, which means to say: Between two contradictory possibilities there is no place for a third. One must choose between life and death. There is no third possibility.

So being logical means to think correctly. If you want to think correctly, you must not forget to apply the three rules. We immediately recognise here principles we have studied and which arise from the metaphysical conception.

In consequence, Logic and Metaphysics are closely united. Logic is a tool, a method of reasoning which proceeds by classing everything in a very definite

fashion and which consequently obliges things to be seen as identical with themselves, and next compels us to choose, to say yes or no and finally excludes between two cases, for example, life and death a third possibility.

When one says, "All men are mortal; this comrade is a man, therefore this comrade is mortal," we have what is termed a *syllogism*, the typical form of logical reasoning. Reasoning thus, we have placed the comrade, we have made a classification. Our mental tendency, when we meet a man or a thing, is to say to ourselves, "To what class does he or it belong?" Our mind poses to itself this problem only. We see things as circles or boxes of different dimensions and our concern is to put the circles or boxes inside each other and in a certain order.

In the example given, we first determine a large circle which contains *all* mortals; next, a smaller circle which contains *all* men; and the next, still smaller, which contains only *this* comrade.

If we want to class them, we next, following a certain "Logic," put the circles one within the other.

You see, the metaphysical conception is built with logic and syllogism. A syllogism is a group of three phrases; the two first are called *premises*, which means to say "sent before"; and the third phrase is the *conclusion*. Another example: "In the Soviet Union, before the last constitution, there existed the dictatorship of the proletariat. Dictatorship is dictatorship. In the U.S.S.R. there is dictatorship. Therefore there was no difference between the U.S.S.R., Italy and Germany, dictatorship countries."

No regard is taken here *for whom* is the dictatorship exercised; just as when they boast of bourgeois democracy, they do not say for the profit of whom that democracy is exercised.

It is thus that people come to pose problems, to see things and the social world as making part of separated circles and to insert the circles within each other.

You have here questions that are certainly theoretical, but that entail a mode of practical action. So we could quote that unfortunate example of Germany in 1919, when Social-Democracy, to retain democracy, killed the dictatorship of the proletariat without realising that by acting thus it was keeping capitalism alive and leaving room for Nazism.

Seeing and studying things separately is what Zoology and Biology did till the time when it was seen and understood that there was an *evolution* of animals and plants. Before that, people classified all beings, thinking that for all time things had been as they are.

"And, in fact, till the end of the last century, natural science was predominantly a *collecting* science, a science of finished things." (F. Engels, *Feuerbach*.)

Now, finally, we must give:

## 7. The explanation of the word "Metaphysics"

In Philosophy there is an important part which is called Metaphysics. However, it is only important in bourgeois philosophy, since it is concerned with God and the Soul. Everything in it is eternal. God is eternal, unchanging, always identical with himself; the soul also. It is the same with Good, Evil, etc., all that being clearly defined, final and eternal. In this part of philosophy, termed metaphysics, things therefore are seen wholly as permanently fixed, and in reasoning upon them, one proceeds by opposition; mind is opposed to matter, good to evil, etc.; that is to say, one reasons by opposing the contraries among them.

This manner of reasoning, of thinking, this conception, is called "metaphysics" because it treats of things and ideas which are outside the physical; things

such as God, Goodness, Soul, Evil, etc. Metaphysics is derived from the Greek *meta*, which means beyond, and from *physics*, the science of the phenomena of the universe. Therefore, metaphysics is that which deals with things *beyond* the world.

It is also because of an accident of history that this philosophic conception is called "metaphysics." Aristotle, who produced the first Treatise on Logic (which is still used), wrote a great deal. After his death, his disciples classified his writings; they made a catalogue, and after a work with the title of "Physics" they found one without a title, which treated of the things of the mind. They classified it by giving it the title "After Physics," in Greek, "Metaphysics."

Let us insist, in conclusion, on the bond that exists between the three terms we have studied, viz., metaphysics, mechanism and logic. These three always appear together and summon each other. They form a system and can only be understood one with the other.

## CONTROL QUESTIONS

1. Show, with examples, that we are accustomed to consider things in their immobility.
2. Give some examples of the metaphysical conception of the world.
3. What is mechanism, and why is it metaphysical?
4. What is Logic.
5. What are the characteristics of the metaphysical conception and method?
6. Can one be a metaphysician and a revolutionary?

PART IV.

STUDY OF DIALECTICS

## CHAPTER I.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF DIALECTICS

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1. Preliminary cautions.
2. Whence arose the dialectical method?
3. Why has dialectics been dominated for so long by the metaphysical conception?
4. Why was the materialism of the 18th century metaphysical?
5. How Dialectical Materialism came into being—Hegel and Marx.

### 1. Preliminary cautions

When people talk about dialectics, they do so sometimes with an air of mystery as if it were something extremely complicated. With a very poor knowledge of it, their talk is all at cross purposes. All this is very regrettable and causes mistakes that should be avoided. Etymologically, the word dialectics means merely the art of discussion, and so it is often heard said of a man who argues at length, and even, by an extension of meaning, of one who speaks well: there is a dialectician!

It is not in this sense that we are going to study dialectics. From the philosophic point of view, it has assumed a special significance. Dialectics, in its philosophical sense, contrary to what is thought, is

within the reach of everybody, for it is a thing that is clear and without mystery. Still, although dialectics may be understood by all, it has its difficulties; and here is how we must understand them.

Amongst handicrafts, some are simple, others are more difficult. Making packing cases, for example, is a simple job. Constructing a radio set, on the other hand, is a job demanding much skill, precision and dexterity in the fingers.

Our hands and fingers are working tools. But thought is also a working tool. And if our fingers are not always capable of exact work, it is the same for our brain. The history of human labour tells us that man at the beginning only knew how to do coarse work. Advance in knowledge has enabled him to do much finer and more precise work. It is exactly the same in the history of thought. Metaphysics is the method of thinking which is capable, like our fingers, only of coarse movements (such as nailing the cases or pulling open the drawers of metaphysics).

Dialectics differs from metaphysics in that it is capable of greater precision. It is nothing else than an extremely exact method of thinking.

The development of thought has been the same as that of manual work. It has the same history, and there is no mystery, all is transparent in its evolution.

The difficulties that we find arise from the fact that perhaps for twenty-five years we nail cases and suddenly we are put to the building of radio apparatus. It is certain that we will have great difficulties, that our hands will be heavy, our fingers clumsy. It is only little by little that we will acquire the necessary dexterity for this work. What was very difficult at the start, will then seem simple to us.

As for dialectics, the same is true. We are hampered, burdened with the ancient metaphysical mode

of thought, and we have to acquire the suppleness, the precision of the dialectical method. There again we see there is nothing mysterious, nothing very complicated.

## 2. Whence arose the dialectical method?

We know that metaphysics considers the world as a collection of fixed things, and that on the contrary, if we look at nature, we see that everything moves, everything changes. We observe the same thing with respect to thought. From this observation it is clear that there is a discord between metaphysics and reality. That is why, for the sake of simplicity of definition and to give the essence of the matter, one can say: Who says "Metaphysics," says "immobility," and who says "dialectics" says "motion." Motion and change, which are in everything that surrounds us, are at the root of dialectics.

"When we reflect on nature, or the history of mankind, or our own intellectual activity, the first picture presented to us is of an endless maze of relations and interactions, in which nothing remains what, where, and as it was, but everything moves, changes, comes into being and passes out of existence." (F. Engels, *Anti-Duhring*.)

We see, according to this exceedingly lucid statement by Engels, that from the dialectic point of view everything changes, nothing remains where it is and consequently this point of view is in perfect accord with reality. Nothing remains in the place it occupies since even that which appears motionless to us, is moving; moving with the passage of the earth round the sun; and moving with the revolution of the earth on its own axis. In metaphysics, the principle of identity requires that a thing remain itself. We see, on the contrary, that nothing remains what it is.

We have the impression that we remain always the same and yet, Engels tells us, "the same things are

different." We think we are identical and we have already changed. From the child that we were, we have become a man, and this man physically never remains the same; he ages every day.

Therefore it is not motion which is a deceptive appearance, as the Eleatics maintained, it is immobility that is deceptive since in fact everything moves and changes.

History also proves to us that things do not remain as they were. At no moment is society immobile. First there was, in antiquity, the slave society, then the feudal system succeeded it, then the capitalist order. The study of these social orders shows us that, continually, imperceptibly, the elements that will enable a new society to be born, have developed within them. So it is that capitalist society changes every day and already in the U.S.S.R. it is transformed. And because no society remains immobile, the socialist society that has been built in the U.S.S.R. is also destined to disappear. It is changing visibly already, and that is why the metaphysicians do not understand what is happening over there. They continue to judge a completely transformed society with their sentiments, their sentiments of men still under the yoke of capitalist oppression.

Our very sentiments change and we take poor notice of it. We see what was sympathy become love, and then sometimes degenerate into hate.

What we see everywhere, in nature, history and thought, is change and motion. Dialectics commences with this observation.

The Greeks were struck by the fact that change and motion are met everywhere. We saw that Heraclitus, who is called the "father of Dialectics," first gave us a dialectic *conception* of the world, that is to say

described the world in motion and not fixed. Heraclitus' mode of seeing could become a *method*.

However, this dialectical method was only able to assert itself much later, and it is necessary for us to see

### 3. Why Dialectics was for a long time dominated by the Metaphysical Concept

We have seen that the dialectical concept was born very early in history, but that men's insufficient knowledge allowed the metaphysical concept to develop. Here we can draw a parallel between idealism which was born of the great ignorance of men and the metaphysical concept which was born of the insufficient knowledge possessed by dialectics.

Why and how was that possible?

Man began the study of nature in a state of complete ignorance. In order to study the phenomena they observe, men begin by classifying them. But from this method of classification there results a habit of mind. In making categories and in dividing these categories from each other, our mind grows accustomed to make such divisions, and we find again there the primary traits of the metaphysical method, and so it was from the undeveloped state of science that metaphysics arose. 150 years ago the sciences were studied separately, apart from each other. For example, Chemistry, Physics and Biology were studied separately and no connection was seen between them. This method was also continually applied *inside* the sciences; physics included sound, heat, magnetism, electricity, etc., and it was thought that these different phenomena were not related; each was studied in different chapters.

We easily recognise there the second characteristic of metaphysics, which requires that the relations between things be ignored, and that there is nothing common to them.

Similarly, it is easier to think of things in a state of rest than in motion. Take for example photography; we see that at first it was sought to fix things in their immobility (that is photography); then afterwards in their motion (that is the cinema). Well, the picture of photography and the cinema is the picture of the development of the sciences and of the human mind. We study things at rest *before* studying them in motion. And why is that? *Because it was not known.* In order to learn, the easiest point of view was taken; now stationary things are more easy to grasp and study.

We find this state of things again in biology, for example, in the study of Zoology and Botany. Because they did not know them well, they first classed the animals in races, in species, thinking that they had nothing in common and *that it had always been so* (the third characteristic of metaphysics).

It was from that there came the theory which is called "fixism," which is, in consequence, a metaphysical theory and arises from the man's ignorance.

#### 4. Why 18th Century Materialism was Metaphysical

We know that Mechanics played a great role in the materialism of the eighteenth century and that this materialism is often called "Metaphysical Materialism." Why was it so? Because the materialist concept is bound up with the development of all the sciences and because, among them, it was mechanics which developed first. In ordinary talk, mechanics means

the study of machines. In scientific language, it means the study of motion in the sense of displacement. And mechanics was the first science to develop, because mechanical motion is the most simple form of motion. The study of an apple that the wind sways in an apple tree is much easier than the study of the change which takes place in the apple when it ripens. One can more easily study the effect of the breeze on the apple than the maturing of the apple. But the former study is "partial" and thus opens the door to metaphysics.

Though they indeed observed that everything moves, the ancient Greeks *could* not avail themselves of this observation, because their knowledge was insufficient. When things and phenomena were observed, they were classified, and people were content to study displacement, whence mechanics; the lack of knowledge in the sciences gave birth to the metaphysical concept.

We know that materialism is always based on the sciences, and that in the 18th century science was dominated by the metaphysical spirit. Of all the sciences, the one most developed in this age was mechanics. That is why Engels said that 18th century materialism was inevitably a metaphysical and mechanistic materialism, because the sciences were so.

We will say then that this metaphysical and mechanical materialism was materialist because it replied to the basic question of philosophy by saying that the primary factor was matter, but that it was metaphysical, because it considered the universe as a collection of fixed things, and mechanical because it studied and saw everything through mechanics.

Later there came a day when people, by the accumulation of research, came to observe that the sciences are not immobile; it was perceived that transformations are produced in them. After having separated Chemi-

stry from Biology and Physics, people came to realise that it was becoming impossible to deal with one without having recourse to the others. For example, the study of digestion, which is in Biology's domain, became impossible without Chemistry. So towards the 19th century it was seen that the sciences are bound up together and there followed an abandonment of the metaphysical spirit in the sciences, because a deeper knowledge of nature had been won. Till then, the physical phenomena were studied separately; now they were obliged to observe that all these phenomena were of the same nature. It is thus that electricity and magnetism, which used to be studied separately, are united to-day in a single science, Electro-magnetism.

Studying the phenomena of sound and heat, it was similarly observed that both issued from a phenomenon of the same nature. By striking with a hammer, both sound and heat are produced. It is the motion which produces heat. And we know that sound is vibrations in the air; the vibrations are also motion. So there we have two phenomena of the same nature.

In Biology, it has come to pass, in classifying in a more and more detailed manner, that species have been found that cannot be classed either as vegetable or animal. Therefore there is no sharp division between vegetables and animals. Continuing ever to push study further, the conclusion was reached that animals have not always been what they are. The facts have condemned fixism and the metaphysical spirit.

It is during the 19th century that this transformation, which we have just seen, was produced, and this has enabled materialism to become dialectical. Dialectics is the spirit of the sciences which, in developing themselves, have abandoned the metaphysical concept. Materialism has been able to transform itself because the sciences have changed. To metaphysical science cor-

responded metaphysical materialism and to the new sciences corresponds a new materialism, dialectical materialism.

## 5. How Dialectical Materialism came into being Hegel and Marx

If it is asked how this transformation of metaphysical materialism into Dialectical Materialism came about, the general answer is:

- (1) There existed metaphysical materialism, that of the 18th century.
- (2) The sciences changed.
- (3) Marx and Engels intervened; they cut metaphysical materialism in two. Abandoning metaphysics, they kept materialism and hooked dialectics to it.

If we have a tendency to present things in that way, it arises from the metaphysical method which likes to simplify things in order to present them diagrammatically. We on the contrary ought to always keep it in mind that *the facts of reality should never be schematised*. The facts are always more complex than they appear and we think. Accordingly, the change from metaphysical to dialectical materialism was not so simple.

Dialectics in fact was developed by a German idealist philosopher, Hegel (1770-1831), who was able to understand the change that had occurred in the sciences. Taking up again the ancient idea of Heraclitus, he observed, aided by scientific advance, that in the universe all is motion and change, that nothing is isolated, but everything is interdependent, so he created Dialectics. It is because of Hegel that we speak to-day of the dialectic movement of the world. What Hegel first grasped was the movement of thought, and he naturally

termed it dialectic, since it was a matter of progress of the mind by the clash of ideas as in discussion.

Still Hegel was an idealist, that is to say he attributed primary importance to the mind, and in consequence he formed a special conception of motion and change. He thought that it is the changes in the mind that cause the changes in matter.

For example, the inventor has an idea, he carries out his idea. It is this idea, materialised, which creates changes in matter.

Hegel therefore is indeed a dialectician, but he subordinates Dialectics to Idealism.

It was then that Marx (1818-1883) and Engels, who were disciples of Hegel, but materialist disciples, consequently giving first importance to matter, studied his dialectics and thought that it gave correct affirmations, but inside out. Engels said on this subject that with Hegel dialectics was standing on its head; it had to be put back on its feet. Marx and Engels, then, transferred to material reality the initial cause of this movement of thought as defined by Hegel and they naturally termed it dialectical, borrowing the term from him.

They thought that Hegel was correct in saying that thought and the universe are perpetually changing, but he was mistaken in asserting that it is changes in ideas which determine the changes in things. *It is, on the contrary, the things which give us ideas, and ideas become modified because things are modified.*

Formerly people travelled in coaches. To-day we travel on railways. It is not because we have the idea of travelling on railways that this mode of locomotion exists. Our ideas have changed because things have changed.

We must therefore avoid saying: "Marx and Engels had, on one side, materialism which issued from the

French materialism of the 18th century; on the other, the dialectics of Hegel; in consequence it only remained for them to tie one to the other."

There you have a too simple, schematic conception which forgets the phenomena that are more complex; it is a metaphysical concept.

Marx and Engels certainly took Hegel's dialectics, but they transformed it. They did as much for materialism to give us Dialectical Materialism.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE LAWS OF DIALECTICS FIRST LAW: DIALECTIC CHANGE

1. What is meant by dialectical movement.
2. "To dialectics, there is nothing final, nothing absolute, nothing sacred." (Engels.)
3. The Process.

#### 1. What is meant by Dialectical Movement?

The first law of dialectics commences by observing "that nothing stays in the same place, nothing remains the same." He who says dialectical, says motion, change. Consequently, when one speaks of taking the dialectical point of view, that means to say, taking the point of view of motion, of change. When we wish to study things according to dialectics, we will study them in their motion, in their changes.

Here is an apple. There are two ways of studying this apple; on the one hand from the metaphysical point of view, on the other from the dialectical point of view.

In the first case, we will give a description of this fruit, its shape, its colour. We will enumerate its properties, speak of its taste, etc. Then we would be able to compare the apple with a pear, see their resemblances, their differences and finally conclude: an apple is an apple and a pear is a pear. Thus it was

that things were studied formerly, numerous books remain to give evidence of this.

If we wish to study the apple from the dialectical point of view, we will take the point of view of movement, not of the movement of the apple when it rolls and changes its location, but of the movement of its development. Then we will observe that the ripe apple has not always been what it is at the moment. Before, it was a green apple, before again a flower and before that a bud. And so we will go back to the state of the apple tree in spring. The apple, then, has not always been an apple, it has a history; and therefore, it will not remain what it is. If it falls, it will rot, decompose; it will let its pips go free, which, if everything goes well, will give rise to a sprout, then to a tree. While the apple has not always been what it is, neither will it remain what it is.

There you have what is termed studying things from the point of view of motion. This is study from the point of view of the past and the future. Studying thus, one sees the actual apple only as a transition between what it was, the past, and what it will be, the future.

That this mode of seeing things may be clearly seen in its proper place, we are giving two more examples: the Earth and the social order. If we take the metaphysical point of view, we will describe the shape of the earth in all its details. We will observe that on its surface there are seas, lands and mountains; we will study the nature of the soil, still taking the same point of view. Then we will be able to compare the earth to other planets or to the moon, and we will finally conclude: the earth is the earth.

While studying the history of the earth from the dialectical point of view, we will see that it was not always what it is, that it has undergone transforma-

tions, and that consequently in future the earth will again undergo other transformations. Therefore, we must to-day consider that the actual state of the earth is only a transition between past changes and changes to come. A transition in which the changes which are being effected are imperceptible although they are on a much greater scale than those effected in the maturing of an apple.

Let us now look at the example of the social order, which is specially interesting to Marxists.

Applying again our two methods; from the metaphysical point of view, we will be told that there have always been rich and poor. It will be observed that there are big banks, enormous factories. We will be given a detailed description of the capitalist social order, that will be compared with the past social orders (feudal, slave) by seeking resemblances or differences and we will be told: the capitalist social order is what it is.

From the dialectical point of view, we will learn that the capitalist social order has not always been what it is. If we observe that in the past other social orders have existed that will mean deducing from that observation that the capitalist social order, like all social orders, is not final, has no untouchable basis, but that it is for us, on the contrary, only a provisional reality, a transition between the past and the future. We see by these examples that to consider things from the dialectical point of view means to consider each thing as provisional, as having a history in the past and necessarily having a history in the future, having a beginning and inevitably an end also.

## 2. "For Dialectics, there is nothing final, nothing absolute, nothing sacred."

"For dialectics nothing is final, absolute, sacred. It reveals the transitory character of everything and in every-

thing; nothing can endure before it except the uninterrupted process of becoming and of passing away." (Engels, *Feuerbach*.)

There is a definition which emphasises what we have just seen, and which we are now going to study.

"For dialectics, there is nothing final." That means to say that for dialectics, everything that we study has a past and will have a future; that, consequently, it is not there once for all and that what it is to-day is not final. (Examples are the apple, the earth, this social order.) For dialectics there is no power in the world, nor beyond the world, which can fix things in a final state, therefore "nothing absolute" (absolute means: which is not subject to any condition; hence universal, eternal, perfect.) "Nothing sacred," that does not mean to say that dialectics despises everything. No! A sacred thing means here a thing that one deems immutable, that one should not touch nor discuss but simply venerate. The capitalist social order is "sacred" for example. Well! dialectics says that *nothing* escapes motion; change and the transformations of history. Transitory means passing. A passing thing is one that must grow old and disappear. Dialectics shows us that everything is destined to disappear. What is young, grows old; what is alive to-day, dies to-morrow, and nothing endures for dialectics "but the uninterrupted process of becoming and of passing away."

Therefore if the dialectical point of view is adopted, nothing is deemed eternal except change. This means to consider that no particular thing can be eternal except "becoming."

But what is this "becoming" that Engels speaks of in his definition?

We have seen that the apple has a history. Now let us take for example a pencil which also has its history.

This pencil which looks somewhat worn to-day was new once. The wood of which it is made came from a plank, and the plank from a tree. We believe then that the apple and the pencil have each a history and both have not always been what they are. Is there any difference between these two histories? Certainly, there is! The green apple became ripe. Could it, being green, if all went well, fail to become ripe? No, it *must* ripen, just as, falling to the ground, it *must* rot, decompose and release its pips. While the tree from which the pencil came, might *not* become a plank, and the plank might *not* become pencil. The pencil, itself, might remain whole, might not be sharpened.

We observe that between these two histories, there is a difference. For the apple is the green apple which became ripe, if nothing abnormal happened, and it was the flower which became the apple. Thus one phase being given, the other phases follow necessarily, inevitably (if nothing arrests the development).

In the history of the pencil, on the contrary, the tree might not become a plank, the plank might not become a pencil, and the pencil might not be sharpened. Hence, one phase being given, the other phase *might not follow*. If the history of the pencil traverses all its phases, it is thanks to alien intervention. In the history of the apple, we find phases which succeed each other, flowing from the first to the second phase, etc. It does so according to the "becoming" of which Engels speaks. With the pencil, the phases are in juxtaposition, but do not flow each from the other. But the apple follows a natural process.

### 3. The Process

(A word which comes from Latin and which means: forward march or the fact of advancing, of progressing.)

Why must the green apple ripen? It is because of what it contains. It is because of internal linkings which impel the apple to ripen; *it is because it was an apple even before being ripe that it could not fail to ripen*.

When one examines the flower which will become an apple, then the green apple which will become ripe, one observes that these internal linkings which impel the apple in its development, act under the rule of internal forces which are termed Autodynamism, which means to say: force which comes from the being itself. When the pencil was still a plank, the intervention of man was necessary for it to become a pencil, for the plank would never have changed itself into a pencil. There were no inner forces, no autodynamism, and no process in action. Therefore he who says dialectics, means not only movement, but also autodynamism.

We see, then, that the dialectical movement contains in itself the process, the autodynamism, which is the essential thing in it. For every movement or change is not dialectical. If we catch a flea that we are going to study from the dialectical point of view; we will say that it will not always be what it is; if we crush it, certainly, there will be a change for it indeed, but will that change be dialectical? No. Without us, the flea would not have been crushed. This change, therefore, is not dialectical. It is *mechanical*.

We must therefore pay careful attention when we speak of dialectical change. We think that if the earth continues to exist, the capitalist society will be replaced by socialist society and then communism. That will be a dialectical change. But, if the earth should blow up, the capitalist social order will disappear not by an autodynamic change, but by a mechanical change.

In another order of ideas, we say that there is mechanical discipline when this discipline is not natural. But it is autodynamic when it is freely agreed to, that is to say when it arises naturally from the environment. A mechanical discipline is imposed from outside, it is a discipline coming from leaders who are different from those they command. We can understand now how a non-mechanical discipline, autodynamic discipline, is not within reach of all organisations.

We must then avoid using dialectics in a mechanical manner. That is a tendency which arises from our habit of thinking metaphysically. We must not repeat like a parrot that things have not always been what they are. When a dialectician says that, he must investigate the facts and discover what things were before. For to say that is not the end of the argument, but the beginning of studies to observe in detail what things were *before*.

Marx, Engels, Lenin made long and exact studies of what the capitalist social order had been before them. They took observations of the tiniest details in order to note the dialectical changes. Lenin, in order to describe and criticise the changes in the capitalist society, to analyse the period of imperialism, made very precise studies and consulted a mass of statistics.

When we speak of auto-dynamism, we must never make a literary phrase of it, we must use this word only in good earnest and for those who entirely comprehend it.

Finally, after having studied a thing, and having seen what are its autodynamic changes and said what change one has observed, one must study further and investigate whence it comes that it is autodynamic.

That is why dialectics, investigations and sciences are closely bound up together.

Dialectics is not a means of explaining and understanding things without having studied them; it is the means of studying well, of observing well by seeking the beginning and the end of things, whence they come and where they are going.

## CHAPTER III.

### SECOND LAW: RECIPROCAL ACTION

1. The concatenation of processes.
2. The great discoveries of the 19th century.
  - (i) The discovery of the living cell and its development.
  - (ii) The discovery of the transformation of energy.
  - (iii) The discovery of the evolution of man and the animals.
3. Historical development or development in a spiral.
4. Conclusion.

#### 1. The concatenation of the processes

We have just seen, apropos of the history of the apple, what the process is. Let us take up this example again. We have investigated where the apple comes from, and in our investigations, we had to go back to the tree. But this question of investigations involves the tree also. Study of the apple leads us to the study of the origins and destinies of the tree. Whence came the tree? From the apple. It comes from an apple which has fallen, which rotted in the earth, gave birth to a sprout, and that leads us to study the soil, the conditions under which the pips of the apple can produce sprouts, and the influences of the air, the sun, etc. Thus beginning with the study

of the apple, we are led to the examination of the soil, passing from the process of the apple to that of the tree, this process in turn is linked with that of the soil. We have what is called "concatenation of processes." That will enable us to enunciate and study the second law of dialectics, the law of reciprocal action. Let us take another example of the concatenation of processes, that of the Workers' University in Paris.

If we study this school from the dialectical point of view, we will investigate whence it comes, and the first answer will be: in Autumn 1932, an assembly of comrades decided to found at Paris a Workers' University to study Marxism. But how did this committee get the idea of having Marxism studied? Obviously because Marxism exists. But then where does Marxism come from?

We see that the investigations of processes conducts us to detailed and complete studies. Investigating whence Marxism comes, we will be brought to observe that this doctrine is the very consciousness of the proletariat; we see then (whether one be for or against Marxism) that the proletariat exists, and then we will again ask the question: Where does the proletariat come from?

We know that it arises from an economic system, capitalism. We also know that the division of society into classes and the class struggle are not born, as our enemies claim, from Marxism, but on the contrary, that Marxism, in that part of it which deals with social matters, notes the existence of the class struggle and draws its strength from the proletariat.

So, from process to process, we come to the examination of the conditions of existence of capitalism. Thus we have a concatenation of processes which demonstrates that everything influences everything else. That is the *law of reciprocal action*.

In finishing with these examples of the apple and the Workers' University, let us see how a metaphysician would have proceeded. In the example of the apple, he would only have been able to think "Where does the apple come from?" And he would have been satisfied with the answer: "The apple comes from the tree." He would not have looked further.

As to the Workers' University, he would have satisfied himself by saying on its origin, that it was founded by a group of men who wish "to corrupt the French people."

But the dialectician sees all the concatenation of processes which in one case produce the apple; in the other, the Workers' University. The dialectician connects the particular fact, the detail, to the whole. He connects the apple to the tree, and he goes back further, back to nature. The apple is not only the fruit of the tree, but also the fruit of all nature.

The Workers' University is not only the "fruit" of the proletariat, it is also the "fruit" of capitalist society.

We see then that, contrarily to the metaphysician who conceives the world as a collection of fixed things, the dialectician will see the world as a collection of processes. And if the dialectical point of view is true for nature and the sciences, it is also true for society.

"The old method of investigation and thought which Hegel calls 'metaphysical' which preferred to investigate things as given, as fixed and stable, had a good deal of historical justification in its day." (F. Engels, *Feuerbach*.)

In consequence, they used in that epoch to study everything and society as a whole made up "of given fixed objects" which not only do not change, but, particularly in the case of society, are not destined to disappear.

Engels points out this

"great basic thought that the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes, in which the things apparently stable no less than their mind-images in our head, the concepts, go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away, in which, in spite of all seeming accidents and of all temporary retrogression, a progressive development asserts itself in the end." (F. Engels, *idem*.)

Capitalist society also, then, must not be considered as a complex of ready-made things, but on the contrary, must also be studied as a complex of processes.

The metaphysicians admit that capitalist society has not always existed, and they say that it has a history, but they think that with its appearance society has completed its evolution and henceforth will remain "fixed." They consider all things as ready-made and not as the beginning of a new process. The story of the creation of the world by God is an explanation of the world as a complex of ready-made things. Every day God completed a set job. He made plants, animals and man, once for all; hence the theory of fixism.

Dialectics judges in the opposite fashion. It considers things not as "fixed objects," but in their "motion." For dialectics, nothing is finished; everything is always the end of one process and the beginning of another, always changing, always developing. That is why we are so sure of the transformation of capitalist society into socialist society, for nothing is finally completed; there will always be development.

But we must direct attention here to the importance of not considering dialectics as something inevitable whence one might conclude: "since you are so sure of the change you desire, why do you fight?" For as Marx said, "for the birth of socialism, a midwife is

necessary," whence the necessity of revolution. Again things are not so simple. The role must not be forgotten of men who can advance or retard this transformation (we will return to this question in Chapter 5 of this section, when we speak of Historical Materialism).

What we are now observing is the existence in all things of a linking of processes which are produced by the internal forces of things (autodynamism). For dialectics, as we insisted above, *nothing is finished*. The development of things must be considered to have no last act. At the end of one play in the world, the first act of another begins.

## 2. The great discoveries of the 19th century

What determined the abandonment of metaphysical thinking and which obliged the scientists, then Marx and Engels, to consider things in their dialectical motion, is as we know the discoveries made in the 19th century. There are above all three great discoveries in this age, indicated by Engels in his book, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, which advanced dialectics.

### 1. *The discovery of the living cell and its development.*

Before this discovery fixism had been taken as the basis of reasoning. The species were deemed alien to each other. Further the animal kingdom was categorically distinguished from the vegetable kingdom. Then came this discovery which enabled the idea of "evolution" that the thinkers and scientists of the 18th century had already put forward, to be made specific. It enables one to understand that life is composed of a succession of deaths and births and that every living being is an association of cells. This observation left no barrier standing between animals and plants and so expels the metaphysical concept.

### 2. *The discovery of the transformation of energy.*

Formerly science believed that sound, heat and light, for example, were completely alien to each other. Now it was discovered that all these other phenomena can be transformed, one into the other, that there are concatenations of processes also indeed in *inert* matter as in living nature. This revelation was another blow to metaphysical thinking.

### 3. *The discovery of evolution in man and the animals.*

Darwin, Engels says, demonstrates that all living things are the results of a long process of development from little germs which are unicellular at the beginning; all is the product of a long process originating in the cell.

And Engels concluded that, thanks to these three great discoveries, we can follow the linking of all natural phenomena not only inside the various fields but also *between* the different fields.

It was, then, the sciences which made possible the enunciation of this second law, the law of reciprocal action.

Between the vegetable, animal and mineral kingdoms there is no gap, but merely processes, everything is linked together. And that is also true for society. The various social orders which have existed in the history of man must be considered as a procession of concatenations of processes, in which each has necessarily sprung from the one that preceded it.

We must then keep it in mind that: *Science, Nature, Society* must be seen as a linking of processes, and the motor which drives this development along is *autodynamism*.

### 3. Historical development or development in spiral

If we examine a little more closely the process that we are beginning to know, we see that the apple is the result of a concatenation of processes. Where does the apple come from? The apple comes from the tree. Where does the tree come from? From the apple. We could think then that we have a vicious circle here in which we revolve always to come back to the same point. Tree, apple, apple, tree. Similarly, if we take the example of the egg and the hen. Whence comes the egg? From the hen. Whence comes the hen? From the egg. If we considered things in that way, there would not be a process there, but a circle; moreover this appearance has evoked the idea "eternal return." That means to say that we would always return to the same point, to the point of departure.

But let us see exactly how the problem is set.

- (i) Here is an apple.
- (ii) This apple, by decomposing, engenders a tree or trees.
- (iii) Each tree yields not an apple but apples.

Therefore we do not return to the *same* point of departure; we return to the apple, but on another plane.

Similarly, if we start from the tree we will get:

1. A tree which yields
2. Apples, and these apples will produce
3. Trees.

Here again, we return to the tree, but on another plane. The point of view is widened.

We have then not a circle, as appearances tended to make us think, but a process of development which we shall call an *historical development*. History shows that time does not pass without leaving a mark. Time

passes but it is not the same developments which return. The world, nature, and society constitute an historical development, a development which is termed in philosophic language "spiral."

This image is used to make the idea definite; it is a comparison, used to illustrate the fact that things evolve according to a circular process, but they do not return to the point of departure, but return somewhat above, on another plane; and so on, which means an ascending spiral. Therefore, the world, nature, society all have an historical development (in a spiral) and what drives this development is, let us not forget, autodynamism.

### 4. Conclusion

In these first chapters on dialectics, we have studied the two first laws; that of change and that of reciprocal action. This was indispensable to being able to enter upon the study of the law of contradiction; for it is this law which will enable us to understand the forces which cause "dialectical change," the driving force of autodynamism.

In the first chapter on the study of dialectics, we saw why this theory had been dominated for a long time by the metaphysical conception, and why the materialism of the 18th century was metaphysical. Now we can better understand, after having rapidly surveyed the three great discoveries of the 19th century, which enabled materialism to develop and become dialectical, why it was necessary that the history of this philosophy should traverse the three great periods that we know: (1) The materialism of antiquity (theory of atoms); (2) Materialism of the 18th century (mechanical and metaphysical); to result at last (3) In dialectical materialism.

We asserted that materialism was born of the sciences and bound up with them. After these three chapters, we can see how true that is. We have seen in this study of dialectical motion and change, then of this law of reciprocal action, *that all our reasonings are based on the sciences.*

To-day, when scientific studies are extremely specialised and when the scientists (generally ignorant of dialectical materialism) sometimes cannot comprehend the importance of their particular discoveries in relation to the sciences as a whole, it is the role of philosophy whose mission, as we have said, is to give an explanation of the world and of the most general problems; it is the particular mission of dialectical materialism to assemble all the special discoveries of each science in order to make a synthesis of them and thus construct a theory which will make us more and more, as Descartes used to say, "masters and owners of nature."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THIRD LAW: CONTRADICTION

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1. Life and Death.
2. Things transform themselves into their opposites.
3. Affirmation, negation, and negation of the negation.
4. The essence of the matter.
5. The unity of opposites.
6. Errors to avoid.
7. Practical consequences of dialectics.

We have seen that dialectics considers things to be perpetually changing, continually evolving, in a word, undergoing dialectical movement (1st Law). This dialectical movement is possible because every thing is only the result, at the moment when we study it, of a concatenation of processes, that is to say a linking up of phases which emerge one from the other. And, pushing our study further, we saw that this concatenation of processes develops necessarily, inevitably in time into a movement of progress "despite momentary regressions."

We termed this development an historical or spiral development, and we know that this development is engendered by autodynamism. Now what are the laws of autodynamism? What are the laws which make the phases emerge one from another? They are what are termed the "laws of dialectical motion."

Dialectics teaches us that things are not eternal; they have a beginning, a maturity, an old age which finishes by one end. All things pass through these phases; birth, maturity, old age, end. Why is it so? Why are not things eternal?

There you have an old question which has always been of passionate interest to humanity. Why must we die? This necessity is not understood and men through History have dreamed of eternal life, of ways of changing the state of affairs, for example, in the middle ages, by inventing magic potions (elixirs of youth, or of life). Why then is that which is born obliged to die? Here is a great dialectical law that we must confront with metaphysics in order to understand it well.

## 1. Life and Death

From the metaphysical point of view, things are considered in an isolated fashion, taken in themselves and, because metaphysics studies things thus, it considers them in a one-sided way. That is why it can be said of those who see things from one side only that they are metaphysicians. In short, when a metaphysician examines the phenomenon that we call life, he does it without joining this phenomenon to another. He sees life for itself and in itself in a one-sided manner. He sees it from only one aspect. If he examines death, he will do the same, he will apply his unilateral point of view and will end by saying: Life is life, and Death is death. Between the two, nothing in common, one cannot be at the same time living and dead, for they are two opposite things, quite contrary to one another.

Looking at things in that way means to look at them superficially. If one examines them a little more closely, it will at once be seen that one cannot oppose

them to each other, since death comes from the living thing, and if this is so we cannot separate them so completely, since experience, reality shows us that death continues life. And life, can it arise from death? Yes. For the elements of the dead body, for example, will be changed to give birth to other lives and to serve as manure to the earth, which will then be more fertile. Death in many cases will help life, death will allow life to be born; and in living bodies themselves, life is only possible because there is a continual replacing of the cells which die by those that are born. Life and death, then, are changed continually one into the other, and, in all things, we see this great law; *everywhere, things change themselves into their opposites\**.

## 2. Things change themselves into their opposite

If we examine truth and error, we think: between them there is nothing in common. Truth is truth and error is error. That is the one-sided point of view which opposes brutally the two opposites as they would oppose life and death.

And yet, if we say: "Look, it's raining," it happens sometimes that we have not finished our sentence, when already the rain has stopped. The phrase was truth when we began it, and it has changed into error. (The Greeks had long ago made that observation and they used to say that if you did not wish to make mistakes, it was necessary to say nothing.) Similarly, let us take again the example of the apple. You see

\*The metaphysicians will have it that contrary things are absolutely opposed to each other. Reality, however, demonstrates to us that contrary things transform themselves, one into the other, that things do not remain themselves, but are transformed into their opposites.

a ripe apple on the ground, and say, "There is a ripe apple." Yet it has been on the ground a certain time and, already, it has begun to rot, so that truth is becoming error.

The sciences also give us numerous examples of laws considered for many years to be "verities" which have been revealed to be "errors" at a certain time when scientific advances have been made. We see then that truth changes into error. But does error change into truth?

At the beginning of civilisation, notably in Egypt, men imagined combats between the Gods in order to explain the rising and the setting of the sun; that was an error to the extent that they said that the gods pushed or pulled the sun to make it move. But science has now partially justified their reasoning by saying that there are really forces which make the sun move. So we see that error is not sharply opposed to truth.

If then things change into their opposite, how is it possible? How does life change into death?

If there were only life, 100 per cent. life, there could never be death, and if death were itself, 100 per cent. death, it would be impossible that one should change into the other. But there is already death in life and therefore life in death.

Looking closely, we see that a living being is composed of cells, that these cells are being renewed, that they disappear and reappear in the same place. They live and die continually in a living being in which there is then both life *and* death.

In the Soviet Union, under special conditions, the blood of dead bodies is preserved and used for the transfusion of blood; so with the blood of the dead, a living person is renewed. Consequently it can be said that there is life in the bosom of death.

"Life is therefore also a contradiction which is present in things and phenomena themselves, and which constantly asserts and solves itself; and as soon as the contradiction ceases, life too comes to an end, and death steps in." (F. Engels, *Anti-Duhring*.)

Things therefore not only change one into another, but moreover a thing is not only itself, but also another thing which is *its opposite*, for each thing *contains* its opposite. Each thing at the same time *contains itself and its opposite*. If a thing is represented by a circle, we will have one force pushing this thing towards life, pushing from the centre to the circumference by, for example, expansion, but we will also have forces which will be pushing this thing in an opposite direction, forces of death, pushing from the circumference towards the centre (compression).

Thus inside each thing opposed forces exist, antagonisms. What happens between these forces? They *struggle*. In consequence a thing is not merely moved by a force acting in one direction; every thing is really moved by two forces which act in opposite directions. Towards the *affirmation* and towards the *negation* of things, towards life and towards death. What does the affirmation and negation of things mean?

There are in life forces which maintain life, which tend towards the affirmation of life. Then there are also in living organisms forces which tend towards negation. In all things, some forces tend towards affirmation and others tend towards negation, and between *affirmation* and *negation*, there is *contradiction*.

Dialectics, then, observes change, but why do things change? Because things are not in accord with themselves, because there is struggle between the forces, between the antagonisms, because there is contradiction. This is the third law of Dialectics. *Things change because they contain contradiction within themselves.*

(If we are obliged sometimes to employ more or less complicated words (like dialectical, autodynamism, etc.) or terms which seem contrary to traditional logic and difficult to understand, it is not that we like to complicate things at our pleasure and thus imitate the bourgeoisie. But this study, although elementary, should be as complete as possible and make it easier to read, later on, the philosophical works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, which use these terms. In any case, since we must employ a language which is out of the usual, we endeavour in the sphere of this study to make it understandable to all.)

### 3. Affirmation, negation and negation of the negation

Here we must make a distinction between what is called *verbal* contradiction which means that when one says "yes" to you, you answer "no," and the contradiction that we have just seen and which is called *dialectical* contradiction, that is to say, contradiction *in the facts*, in things.

When we speak of the contradiction which exists in the bosom of capitalist society, that does not mean to say that some say yes and others no on certain theories; it means that there is a contradiction in the facts, that there are real forces which are combating each other; first a force which tends to affirm itself, that is the bourgeois class which tends to maintain itself; then a second social force which tends to the negation of the bourgeois class; that is the proletariat. The contradiction then is in the facts, because the bourgeoisie cannot exist without creating its opposite, the proletariat. As Marx says, "above all, the bourgeoisie produces its own grave diggers."

To prevent that, the bourgeoisie would have to renounce its own being, which would be absurd. Consequently by asserting itself, it creates its own negation.

Take the example of an egg that has been laid and is being hatched by a hen; we observe that, in the egg, a germ is found which at a certain temperature and under certain conditions, develops. This germ by developing gives rise to a chicken: thus this germ is already the negation of the egg. We see that there are two forces in the egg; that which tends to it remaining an egg and that which tends to it becoming a chicken. The egg, then, is in disaccord with itself and all things are in disaccord with themselves.

That may seem difficult to understand, because we are accustomed to the metaphysical style of reasoning, and that is why we must make an effort to accustom ourselves anew to see *things in their reality*. A thing commences by being an *affirmation* which emerges *from the negation*. The chicken is an affirmation which issued from the negation of the egg. That is one phase of the process. But the hen in its turn will be the transformation of the chicken, and at the core of this transformation, there will be contradiction between the forces that fight for the chicken to become a hen, and the forces that fight that the chicken may remain chicken. The hen, then, will be the negation of the chicken which came itself from the negation of the egg.

The hen therefore will be the negation of the negation. And that is the general course of the phases of dialectics.

1. Affirmation, also called Thesis.
2. Negation or Antithesis.
3. Negation of the negation or Synthesis.

These three words sum up dialectical development. They are used to represent the linking up of the

phases; to indicate that each phase is the destruction of the preceding phase.

Destruction is negation. The chicken is the negation of the egg, since in its birth it destroys the egg. The ear of corn similarly is the negation of the grain of corn. The grain germinates in the ground, this germination is the negation of the grain and produces the plant; this plant in its turn will blossom and produce an ear; that will be the negation of the plant or the negation of the negation.

We see therefore that the negation of which dialectics speaks, is a summary way of speaking of destruction. There is negation of that which disappears, of that which is destroyed.

1. Feudalism was the negation of chattel slavery.
2. Capitalism is the negation of Feudalism.
3. Socialism will be the negation of Capitalism.

Just as with regard to contradiction, where we made a distinction between verbal and logical contradiction, we must understand what is the verbal negation which says "no" and the dialectical negation which means to say "destruction."

However if negation means destruction, it is not a matter of any kind of destruction, but of a dialectical destruction. Thus when we crush a flea, it does not perish through internal destruction, by dialectical negation. Its destruction is not the result of autodynamic phases, it is the result of a purely mechanical change.

Destruction is a negation *only* if it is a product of affirmation, if it emerges from the latter. Thus the hatched egg being the affirmation of what the egg is, engenders its negation; it becomes a chicken and the chicken symbolises the destruction or negation of the egg for it perforates and destroys the shell.

In the chicken, we see two forces, hostile to each other: "chicken" and "hen," in the course of the

development of the process, the hen will lay eggs, whence a new negation of the negation. From these eggs there will then start a new concatenation of processes. In the corn, we also see an affirmation, then a negation and a negation of the negation.

For another example, let us take that of materialist philosophy.

At the beginning, we find primitive, spontaneous materialism, which, because it is ignorant, creates its own negation, idealism. However the idealism which denies ancient materialism will itself be denied by modern or dialectical materialism, because philosophy develops and with the sciences provokes the destruction of idealism. There also, then, we have affirmation, negation and negation of the negation.

We observe this cycle also in the evolution of society.

We see at the beginning of history a society of primitive communism, a society without classes, based on the common ownership of the soil. But this form of property becomes an obstacle to the development of production, and by that very fact, creates its own negation: society with classes, based on private property and on the exploitation of man by man. However this society also bears within itself its own negation, because a higher development of the means of production brings the necessity of negating the division of society into classes, of negating private property, and so we return to the point of departure; the necessity of a communist society, *but on another plane*; at the beginning of history, we had a scarcity of products; to-day we have a very high productive capacity.

Note that in all the examples we have given, we return indeed to the point of departure, but on another plane (spiral development).

We see then that contradiction is a great law of dialectics. That evolution is a struggle of antagonistic forces. That not only do things transform themselves one into another, but also that each thing transforms itself into its opposite. That things are not in accord with themselves because there is within them a struggle between opposed forces, because there is in them an internal contradiction.

NOTE: We must pay constant attention to the following, viz., that affirmation, negation and negation of the negation are only a summary of dialectical evolution, that one must not run round the world finding everywhere these three phases. For we will not always find all of them; but sometimes only the first or the second, the evolution not being completed. We must not then want to see such changes mechanically in all things. Remember above all that contradiction is the great law of dialectics. That is the essential point.

#### 4. The essence of the matter.

Already we know that dialectics is a method of thinking, of reasoning, of analysing which helps us to observe well and to study well, for it obliges us to seek the origin of everything and to describe its history.

Certainly the old method of thinking, as we have seen, was necessary in its time. But studying with the dialectical method is to observe, let us repeat, that all things, in appearance immobile, are only a linking up of processes in which everything has a beginning and an end, where in everything:

"in spite of all seeming accidents and of all temporary retrogression, a progressive development asserts itself in the end." (Engels.)

Dialectics alone enables us to understand the development, the evolution of things, it alone permits

us to understand the destruction of old things and the birth of the new. Dialectics alone makes us understand all developments in their transformations by recognising them as wholes formed of opposites. For, according to the dialectical concept, the natural development of things, evolution, is a continual struggle of opposing forces and principles.

So then, for dialectics, the primary law is the observation of motion and change. "Nothing remains what it is, nothing stays where it is." (Engels) We know now that the explanation of this law resides in this, that things change not merely in transforming themselves one into another, but in transforming themselves into their opposites. Contradiction, therefore, is a great law of dialectics.

We have studied what contradiction is from the dialectical point of view, but we must again insist on this in order to be more specific and also to signalise certain errors that must not be committed. It is indeed certain that we must primarily familiarise ourselves with this affirmation, which accords with reality, viz., the changing of things into their opposites. Certainly it gives our mind a shock, we are astonished, because we are accustomed to think in the old metaphysical manner. But we have seen why it is so; we have seen in detailed fashion, by means of examples, that it is so in reality and *why* things change into their opposites.

That is why one can say and assert that if things transform themselves, change, evolve, it is because they are in contradiction with themselves, because they bear within them their own opposites, that is because they contain in themselves the *unity of opposites*.

#### 5. The Unity of Opposites

Each thing is a unity of opposites.

To assert such a thing appears absurd at once. "A thing and its opposite have nothing in common," that is what is generally thought. But, according to dialectics, everything is at the same time itself and its opposite; everything is a unity of opposites, and we must explain this thoroughly.

To a metaphysician, the unity of opposites is an impossible thing. For him, things are made in one piece, in accord with themselves, and now you have us asserting the contrary, to wit that things are made of two pieces—themselves and their opposites—and that within them there are two forces who fight each other because things are not in accord with themselves, because they contradict themselves.

If we take the example of ignorance and science, that is to say knowledge, we know that from the metaphysical point of view the two are totally opposite and contrary to each other. He who is ignorant is not a scientist, and he who is a scientist is not ignorant. Yet, if we look at the facts, we see that they give no room for such a rigid opposition. We see that at first ignorance reigned, then came science; and there we verify the fact that a thing changes into its opposite; ignorance transforms itself into science.

There is no ignorance without science, 100% ignorance does not exist. However ignorant an individual may be, he at least knows enough to recognise objects such, e.g., as his food; *there never is absolute ignorance*, there is always a piece of knowledge in the ignorance. Science is already in germ in the ignorance; it is, therefore, correct to state that the opposite of a thing is inside the thing itself.

Now let us look at science. Can there be science to the extent of 100%? No. Something is always unknown. Lenin said, "The object of knowledge is inexhaustible," which means to say that there is al-

ways something to learn. *Absolute knowledge does not exist*. All knowledge, all science contains a share of ignorance. What really exists is *relative* ignorance and *relative* knowledge, a mixture of science and ignorance.

Therefore it is not the *transformation* of things into their opposites that we observe in this example; it is the existence in *one and the same* thing of opposites, or the *unity of opposites*.

We could bring again the examples that we have already seen; life and death, truth and error, and we would observe that in both cases as in all things, there exists a unity of opposites, that is to say that each thing contains at once itself and its opposite. That is why Engels said:

"If investigation always proceeds from this standpoint, the demand for final solutions and eternal truth ceases once for all; one is always conscious of the necessary limitation of all acquired knowledge, of the fact that it is conditioned by the circumstances in which it was acquired. On the other hand, one no longer permits oneself to be imposed upon by the antitheses, insuperable for the still common old metaphysics, between true and false, good and bad, identical and different, necessary and accidental. One knows that these antitheses have only a relative validity; that that which is recognised now as true has also its latent false side which will later manifest itself, just as that which is now regarded as false has also its true side by virtue of which it could previously be regarded as true." (Engels, *F Feuerbach*.)

This passage from Engels shows well how dialectics must be understood and the true meaning of the unity of opposites.

## 6. Errors to avoid

This great law of dialectics, contradiction, must be clearly explained if misunderstandings are to be avoided.

First, it must not be taken in mechanical fashion. It must not be thought that in all knowledge, there is truth *plus* error, or the true *plus* the false.

If one were to apply the law thus, one would justify those who say that in all opinions there is a part of truth plus a part of error, and that "Let us remove what is false, and there will remain what is true, what is good." That is said in certain allegedly Marxist circles, where it is thought that Marxism is correct in showing that in capitalism there are factories, banks, trusts which hold the economic life in their hands, that it is correct in saying that this economic life is going badly; but what is false in Marxism, they add, is the class struggle; leave the theory of class struggle on one side, and you will have a good doctrine. It is also said that Marxism applied to the study of society is correct and true, but why mix dialectics with it? That is the false side, take dialectics away and let us keep as true the rest of Marxism.

There you have mechanical interpretations of the unity of opposites. Here is another example. Proudhon, after having read this theory of opposites, thought that in everything there was a good and a bad side so, observing that in society there is the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, he said: let us remove that which is bad, viz., the proletariat. And it is thus that he propounded his system of credits which was to create parcelled out property, that is to say permit the proletarians to become owners; in that way there would be nobody besides the bourgeois, and society would be in good order.

However we know very well that there is no proletariat without the bourgeoisie, and that the bourgeoisie lives only by the proletariat; they are two opposites which are inseparable. This unity of opposites

is inner, actual; it is an inseparable unity. Therefore it does not suffice, in order to suppress opposites, to cut one from the other. In a society based on the exploitation of man by man, two antagonistic classes inevitable exist: bourgeoisie and proletariat.

To put an end to capitalist society, to have a classless society, both bourgeoisie and proletariat must be ended. That alone will permit liberated man to create a society which will be more developed materially and intellectually, and to proceed to the higher form of socialism, i.e., communism, and not to create as our enemies allege, a communism with all "equal in poverty."

-We must therefore be very careful when we explain or when we apply the unity of opposites to an example or to an investigation. We must not try to find it always and everywhere and to apply mechanically, for example, the negation of the negation to find always and everywhere the unity of opposites. Remember that our knowledge is still in general very limited: and we may be led into blind alleys.

What counts is the principle; dialectics and its laws oblige us to study things in order to discover their evolution and the forces, the opposites which determine this evolution. We must therefore study the unity of opposites which is contained in things, and this unity of opposites amounts to saying that an *assertion is never an absolute assertion*, since it holds within itself a share of negation. And there you have the essential; it is because things contain their own negation that they transform themselves. The negation is the "solvent," if it did not exist, things would not change. As in fact things do transform themselves, they must contain a dissolving principle. We can say in advance that it exists, since we see things undergo evolution, but we cannot discover it without a detailed study of

the thing in question, for this principle has not the same aspect in all things.

## 7. The practical results of Dialectics

In practice, then, dialectics obliges us to consider always not one side of things, but both sides; never to consider truth without error, knowledge without ignorance. The great error of metaphysics is precisely that of considering only one side of things, of judging in a unilateral way and when we make many mistakes. It is always to the extent that we see only one side of things; it is because we often reason one-sidedly.

While idealist philosophy asserts that the world exists only in the ideas of men, we must recognise that there are in fact things which exist only in our thinking. That is true. But idealism is one-sided, it sees only this aspect. It sees only the man who invents things which are not in reality, and it concludes from that that nothing exists outside our ideas. Idealism is correct in emphasising this faculty of man, but as it does not apply the criterion of practice, it sees only that faculty.

Metaphysical materialism is also mistaken because it sees only one side of the question. It sees the universe as a mechanism. Does mechanism exist? Yes. Does it play a big role? Yes. Metaphysical materialism is then correct in saying so, but it is an error to see only mechanical motion.

We naturally tend to see only one side of things and people. If we judge a comrade, nearly always we are looking only at his good or at his bad side. *Both* must be seen, without that it would not be possible to have cadres in our organisations. In political activity, the method of one-sided judgment leads to sectarianism. If we meet an adversary who belongs to a Fascist organisation, we judge him by his leaders. And yet, he is perhaps merely a little clerk who is bitter and dis-

satisfied, and we must not judge him as we would a big fascist magnate.

If we think of the unity of opposites, we will consider things in their multiple aspects. We will then see that the above fascist is a fascist on one side, but on the other that he is a worker, and that there is a contradiction in him. We will investigate and find why he has joined such an organization and also why he should not have joined it. And then we will judge and discuss him in a less sectarian fashion.

We should then, in conformity with dialectics, consider things from all possible angles.

To sum up and as a theoretical conclusion we will say: Things change because they hold an internal contradiction (themselves and their opposites). The opposites are in conflict and the changes are born from this conflict; thus the change is the *solution* of the conflict.

Capitalism contains this internal contradiction, this conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; the change is explained by this conflict, and the transformation of capitalist society into socialist society means the end of the conflict. There is change, motion there where there is contradiction. The contradiction is the negation of the affirmation and when the third term, negation of the negation, is obtained, the solution emerges, for at that moment the reason for the contradiction is eliminated.

One can therefore say that if the sciences, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, etc., study the laws of change which are peculiar to them, dialectics studies the most general laws of change. Engels says: "Dialectics is nothing else than the science of the general laws of motion. (Engels, *Feuerbach*.)"

READING.—Engels: *Anti-Duhring*. Chap. 13 and 14; Lenin: *Karl Marx and His Teaching*.

## CHAPTER V.

### FOURTH LAW: TRANSFORMATION OF QUANTITY INTO QUALITY, OR THE LAW OF PROGRESS BY LEAPS

#### 1. Reforms or Revolution.

1. The Political Argument.
2. The Historical Argument.
3. The Scientific Argument.

#### 2. Historical Materialism.

1. How is History to be explained?
2. History is the work of men.

It remains for us now before entering upon the problem of the application of dialectics to History, to study the last law of dialectics. That will be easier for us because of the studies that we have just completed, in which we have seen what is the negation of the negation and what is meant by the unity of opposites.

As always, let us proceed with examples.

#### 1. Reforms or Revolution?

Speaking of the social order, it is asked: Must one proceed by reforms or by revolution? It is much dis-

cussed whether, in order to transform capitalist society into socialist society, this goal will be reached by successive reforms or by a sudden transformation, the revolution.

Facing this problem, recall what we have already studied. Every transformation is the result of a struggle between opposite forces. If a thing evolves, it does so because it contains its opposite, each thing being a union of opposites. One observes the dispute of the opposites and the change of the thing into its opposite. *How is this transformation carried out?* That is the new problem before us.

It may be thought that this transformation is effected little by little, by a series of small changes; that the green apple is changed into a ripe apple by a series of tiny changes.

Many people in the same way think that society transforms itself little by little and that the result of a series of these little changes will be the change of capitalist society into socialist society. These little changes are reforms, and it will be their total, the sum of these gradual slight changes which will give us a new society.

This is the theory that is called Reformism. Those who are supporters of this theory are called reformists not because they demand reforms, but because they think that reforms are enough, that by their accumulation, the reforms must almost imperceptibly transform society. Let us examine if this is true:

#### 1. *The Political Argument.*

If we look at the facts, that is to say what has happened in other countries, we see that where this system has been tried it has not succeeded. The transformation of the capitalist social order—its destruction, has succeeded in only one country, the U.S.S.R., and we

observe that this was not by a series of reforms but by revolution.

2. *The Philosophical Argument.* Is it true, generally speaking, that things are transformed by small changes, by reforms? Let us always look at the facts. If we examine changes, we will see that they are not produced in an *indefinite* way, that they are not continuous. There comes a moment when in place of small changes, the change is made by an abrupt leap.

Let us take the earth as an example. We will note that periodically there have been sudden changes, catastrophes. In the period we call pre-history, we know the age of the reindeer hunters. They had a primitive culture, they made clothes from the skins of the reindeer they hunted, and lived on their flesh.

Gradually, changes took place in the earth and one day there occurred what the Bible calls the Flood, and science calls the period of torrential rains, which destroyed the civilisation of the reindeer hunters. Those who survived lived in caves and completely changed their way of living.

There we see that the earth and civilisation underwent a sudden change, as a result of the geological catastrophe.

In the history of societies also we observe abrupt changes, revolutions.

Even those who are ignorant of dialectics know in our days that violent changes have occurred in history; yet, till the 17th century, it was believed that "nature does not make a jump," does not leap; people did not want to see the sharp changes in the continuity of change but science intervened and demonstrated in fact that sudden changes do take place.

To-day, those who do not deny these sharp changes allege that they are *accidents*, an accident being a thing which happens and which *might not* have happened.

Thus they explain the revolutions recorded in the history of societies, "They are accidents."

They explain, for example, in reference to the history of our country that the fall of Louis XVI and the French Revolution came because Louis XVI was a weak, soft man: "If he had been a vigorous man, we would not have had the Revolution." One even reads that if he had not prolonged his meal at Varennes, he would not have been arrested and the course of history would have changed. Therefore, the French Revolution is an accident, they say.

Dialectics, on the contrary, recognises that revolutions are necessities. There are indeed continuous changes, but in accumulating they end by producing sharp changes.

### 3. *The Scientific Argument.*

Take the example of water. Begin at 0 degrees and raise the temperature of the water by 1°, 2°, 3°, up to 98 deg., the change is continuous. But can it continue so indefinitely? We go on still to 99 deg., but at 100 deg. we have a sharp change, the water *turns to steam*. If, inversely, we cool the water to 1°, again we will have a continuous change, but we cannot continue this indefinitely, for at 0 deg., the water is transformed into ice.

From 1° to 99° the water still remains water, it is only its temperature that changes. That is what is called a *quantitative* change, which answers the question, "How much?" That is to say "How much heat is in the water? When the water changes into ice or steam, we have a *qualitative* change, a change of quality. It is no longer water, it has become ice or steam.

When the thing does not change in nature, we have a quantitative change (in the example of water, we have a change in degree of heat, but not of nature).

When it changes in nature, when the thing becomes *another* thing, the change is qualitative.

We see, therefore, that the evolution of things cannot be indefinitely quantitative; in the end, the changing things undergo a qualitative change. *Quantity is transformed into quality.* That is a general law. But, as always, one must not stick solely to this abstract formula.

You will find in Engels' book, *Anti-Duhring*, in the chapter "Dialectics, Quantity and Quality" a great number of examples which will enable you to understand that in everything, as in the natural sciences, is verified the exactness of the law according to which:

"quantitative change suddenly produces, at certain points, a qualitative difference." (Engels, *Anti-Duhring*.)

Here is a new example, given by H. Wallon in Vol. 8 of the French Encyclopedia (in which he refers the reader to Engels); nervous energy accumulating in a child provokes laughter, but if it continues to grow, laughter changes to tears; so when children get excited and laugh too much they finish by weeping.

We will give a final example that everyone knows; that of the man who is a candidate for Parliament. If 4,500 votes are necessary for a majority, the candidate is not elected with 4,499 votes, he remains a candidate. With one vote more, the quantitative change determines a qualitative change, for the candidate that was becomes a member of Parliament.

This law brings us the solution of the problem; reform or revolution.

The reformists say to us, "you want impossibilities which happen only by accident; you are utopians." However we see clearly with this law who are those who dream of impossible things! The study of natural phenomena and of science demonstrates to us that changes are not indefinitely continuous, but at a certain moment the change becomes abrupt.

It may then be asked, what role do we play in these abrupt transformations?

We are going to answer this question and develop this problem by applying dialectics to History. So now we have come to a very famous part of dialectical materialism, historical materialism.

## 2. Historical Materialism

What is Historical Materialism? It is simply, now that you know what dialectics is, the application of this method to the history of human societies. For better understanding, we must specify what History is. History means change, change in society. Society has a history and this changes continually; we see great events occur in it. And so the problem is set; since in history, societies change, what is it that explains these changes?

### 1. How is History explained?

Thus we wonder "Why do wars keep returning? Men should live in peace."

To such questions, we are going to supply materialist answers. War, as explained by a cardinal, is a punishment of God; there you have an idealist answer, for it explains events by God; that means explaining history by the mind. Here it is the mind that creates and makes history.

To speak of Providence is also an idealist reply. It was Hitler who, in *Mein Kampf*, told us that history is the work of Providence, and he thanked Providence for having placed his birthplace on the Austrian frontier.

To make God, or Providence, responsible for history, is a convenient theory; men can do nothing, and, consequently, we can do nothing against war; it must be allowed to happen.

Can we from the scientific point of view sustain such a theory? Can we find justification for it in the facts? No.

The first materialist assertion, in this discussion, is that history is not the work of God, but that it is the *work of men*. Then men can act on history and they can prevent war.

## 2. *History is the Work of Men.*

"Men make their own history, whatever its outcome may be, in that each person follows his own consciously desired end, and it is precisely the resultant of these many wills operating in different directions and of their manifold effects upon the outer world that constitutes history. Thus it is also a question of what the many individuals desire. The will is determined by passion or deliberation. But the levers which immediately determine passion or deliberation are of very different kinds . . . The further question arises . . . What are the historical causes which transform themselves into these motives in the brains of the actors?" (Engels, *Feuerbach*.)

This text of Engels tells us then that men act according to their wills, but that these wills do not always go in the same direction. What is it that *determines*, what is it then that causes the actions of men? Why do their wills differ?

Some idealists will agree that it is the actions of men that make History and that this action results from their will; it is the will that determines the action, and it is our thoughts or our feelings that determine our will. We will then have the following Process: idea → will → action, and to *explain* the action, we will follow the reverse path, to seek the idea, the determining cause.

Now we immediately state definitely that the action of great men and of doctrines is undeniable, but it needs must be explained. And it is not explained by

the process action → will → idea. It is thus that some allege that in the 18th century Diderot and the Encyclopaedists by disseminating the theory of the Rights of Man, by these ideas seduced and gained the will of men who in consequence carried out the Revolution; similarly that in the U.S.S.R. the ideas of Lenin were disseminated and the people acted in conformity with those ideas. And they conclude that if there were no revolutionary ideas, there would be no revolution. It is this point of view that makes it said that the motive forces of History are the ideas of the great leaders; that it is these leaders who make History. You know the formula of the Action Francaise: "40 Kings have made France." One could add "Kings who still did not have many ideas."

What is the materialist point of view in the question?

We have seen that between the Materialism of the 18th century and modern materialism, there are many points in common, but that the old materialism had an idealist theory of history.

"The old materialism," Engels says, "judges everything according to the motives of the action, it divides men in their historical activity into noble and ignoble and then finds that as a rule the noble are defrauded and the ignoble are victorious. Hence it follows for the old materialism that nothing very edifying is to be got from the study of history, and for us that in the realm of history the old materialism becomes untrue to itself because it takes the ideal driving forces which operate there as ultimate causes, instead of investigating what is behind them." (*Feuerbach*.)

So, whether openly idealist, or hidden under the mask of inconsistent materialism, the idealist theory which we have just examined, and which appears to explain history, does not explain everything. *For what arouses action?* Some people claim it is the will and ideas.

But *why* did the philosophers of the 18th century have *precisely* these ideas? If they had attempted to expound Marxism, no one would have listened, for in that age the people would not have understood. The fact that one gives ideas does not count by itself, it is also necessary that they should be understood; consequently there are *set periods* for accepting ideas and also for forging them.

We have always said that ideas have great importance, but we must see *where* they come from.

We must then investigate what are the causes which give us ideas, what are, in the last analysis, *the motive forces of History*.

## QUESTIONS

### CHAPTER I.

1. Where does the metaphysical method come from?
2. Where does the dialectical method come from?
3. Why and how was metaphysical materialism transformed into dialectical materialism?
4. What are the philosophical relations between Hegel and Marx?

### CHAPTER II.

1. What is a mechanical change?
2. How does dialectics conceive change?

### CHAPTER III.

1. How does dialectics conceive change? (Compare the answer of the preceding lesson to this.)
2. What is an historical development?
3. Why and how do things transform themselves?

## CHAPTER IV.

1. How must dialectics not be understood?

## CHAPTER V.

1. What is dialectics?
2. What are its laws?

PART V.

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

## CHAPTER I.

### THE MOTIVE FORCES OF HISTORY

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1. An error to avoid.
2. "Social Existence" and Consciousness.
3. Idealist Theories.
4. The "Social Existence" and the conditions of existence.
5. The Class Struggle, History's Motive Force.

Immediately the question is asked, "Where do our ideas come from?", it can be seen that we must go further in our investigations. If we were to reason as did the materialists of the 18th century, who thought that "the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile," we would reply to this question that it is nature which produces the mind and that, consequently, our ideas are the product of nature, that they are produced by the brain. One would say therefore that History is made by the *action* of men impelled by their wills which are the expression of their *ideas*, these coming from their brain. But attention!

#### 1. An error to avoid

If we explain that the Great Revolution was the result of the application of the ideas born in the brains of the philosophers, you will have a limited, insufficient explanation and a bad application of materialism. For what must be seen, is *why* these ideas, which were

launched by the thinkers of that epoch, were taken up by the masses. Why was Diderot not alone in producing them, and for what reason, since the 16th century, were a great majority of brains elaborating the same ideas?

Is it because brains are all of the same weight, of the same convolutions? No. There are changes in ideas and these are not produced by changes inside the skull.

This explanation of ideas by the brain *appears* to be a materialist explanation. But to speak of the brain of Diderot is in reality to speak of the *ideas* from the brain of Diderot; it is therefore a falsified, improper materialist theory in which we see the idealist tendency reborn; with the ideas.

Let us return to the linking: History-action-will-ideas. Ideas have a meaning, a content; the working class, for example, struggle for the overthrow of capitalism. This is thought by the workers in the struggle. They think because they have a brain, it's true, and the brain is therefore a *necessary condition* for thinking, but not a *sufficient* condition. The brain explains the material fact of having ideas, but it does not explain why one has such and such ideas rather than other ideas.

"Everything which sets men in motion must go through their minds; but what form it will take in the mind will depend very much upon the circumstances." (F. Engels, *Feuerbach*.)

How then can we explain the content of our ideas, that is to say how does the idea of overthrowing capitalism come to us?

## 2. "Social Existence" and Consciousness

We know that our ideas are the reflection of things; the aims that loom through our ideas are also the

reflection of things, but of what things?

To answer this question, one must see *where* men live and *where* their ideas manifest themselves. We observe that men live in a capitalist society and that their ideas manifest themselves in that society and come to them from it.

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness." (Karl Marx, Preface to *Critique of Political Economy*.)

In this definition, what Marx calls "their existence" is the men, is what we are; consciousness is what we think, what we desire. We struggle for an ideal that is deep-rooted in us, it is generally said, and the result is that it is our *consciousness* which determines our existence; we act the way we do because we think that way, our desires are in that direction.

It is a great mistake to speak thus, for it is in truth our *social existence* which determines our *consciousness*.

A proletarian "being" thinks in a *proletarian* way, and a bourgeois "being" thinks in a *bourgeois* way (we will see later on why it is not always so). Still, generally speaking:

"A man thinks differently in a palace and in a hut." (Engels, *Feuerbach*.)

## 3. Idealist theories

The idealists say that a proletarian or a bourgeois are the one or the other because they *think* like the one or the other.

We say, on the contrary, that if they think like a proletarian or like a bourgeois, it is because they are the one or the other. A proletarian has a consciousness which is of the proletarian variety because he is a proletarian.

What we must clearly note is that the idealist theory implies a practical result. If one is bourgeois, they say, it is because one thinks like a bourgeois. Therefore, in order to be no longer bourgeois, it is sufficient to change the fashion of thinking in question, and to get bourgeois exploitation ended, it would be sufficient to have a campaign to convince the employers. There you have a theory defended by Christian Socialists; it was also the theory of the founders of Utopian Socialism.

But it is also the theory of the fascists who "combat" capitalism not to end it but to make it more "reasonable." When the bosses come to understand that they exploit the workers, they say, they will do it no longer. It is in fact a completely idealist theory whose dangers are obvious.

#### 4. The "social existence" and the conditions of existence

Marx speaks to us of the "social existence." What does he understand by that?

The "social existence" is determined by the conditions of material existence in which men live in the social order.

It is not the consciousness of men that determines their material conditions of existence, but it is these material conditions which determine their consciousness.

What is it that is termed material conditions of existence? In society there are rich and poor, and their way of thinking is different, their ideas on one and the same subject are different. To take a trip on the railway, for a poor man, an unemployed, is a luxury, but for a rich man who has had a motor car, it is a downfall.

Does the poor man have these ideas about the railway because he is poor, or is it because he travels in the railway that he has them? It is because he is poor. Being poor is his condition of existence.

Then it must be ascertained *why* there are rich and poor if we are to explain the conditions of existence of men.

A group of men whose material conditions of existence are the same *form a class*, but the notion of class is not reducible to that of wealth or of poverty. A proletarian may make more money than a bourgeois; he is none the less proletarian, because he depends on an employer and because his living is neither *secure* nor *independent*. The material conditions of existence are not constituted solely by the money gained, but by the *social function*, and so we have the following linking up: Men make their *history* by their *action* following their *will*, which is the expression of their *ideas*. Their ideas come from the conditions of material existence. that is to say from their belonging to a *class*.

#### 5. Class struggle, the motive force of History

Men act because they have certain ideas. They owe these ideas to their conditions of material existence, because they belong to one or other class. That does not mean to say that there are only two classes in society; there are a number of classes, of whom the two principal are in combat, bourgeoisie and proletariat.

*Therefore, under ideas the classes are to be found.*

Society is divided into classes, which struggle one against another. So, if one examines the ideas men have in society, one observes that these ideas are in conflict, and that under these ideas we find the classes which themselves also are in conflict. Consequently, the motive force of History, that is to say, *what explains History is the class struggle.*

If we take as example the permanent deficit in the Budget, we see that there are two solutions; one which consists in continuing what is called orthodox finance; economies, loans, new taxes, etc.; and the other solution which consists in making the rich pay.

We observe a political struggle around these ideas, and generally there is "regret" that agreement cannot be reached on this subject; but the Marxist wants to understand and investigates what is behind the political struggle; then he discovers the social struggle, that is to say the class struggle. A struggle between those who are partisans of the first solution (the capitalists) and those who want to make the rich pay (the middle class and the proletariat.)

"In modern history at least it is therefore proved that all political struggles are class struggles, and all class struggles for emancipation, despite their necessarily political form—for every class struggle is a political struggle—turn ultimately on the question of economic emancipation." (F. Engels, *Feuerbach*.)

Thus we have a link to add to the chain that we know, to explain history, we have *action, will, ideas*, behind which the *classes* are found and behind the classes the *economic conditions* are to be found. *It is then indeed the class struggles which explain History, but it is the economic conditions which determine the classes.*

If we wish to explain an historical fact, we must examine what ideas are in conflict, seek the classes behind the ideas and lastly define the economic mode which characterises the classes. One may wonder next where the classes and the economic mode come from (and the dialecticians are not afraid of asking all these successive questions because they know that it is necessary to find the source of everything). This is what we will study in the next chapter, but we can already say:

In order to know *where* the classes come from, the history of society must be studied, and it will then be seen that the classes have not always been the same. In ancient Greece, slaves and the masters; in the middle ages, the serfs and the barons; finally, to simplify this enumeration, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

We observe in this table that the classes change, and if we seek why they change, we will find that it is because the *economic conditions* have changed (the economic conditions are: the structure of the production, circulation, distribution and consumption of wealth, and, as basic condition of all the rest, the mode of production, technique.)

Here now is a text from Engels:

"Bourgeoisie and proletariat both arose in consequence of a transformation of the economic conditions, more precisely, of the mode of production. The transition, first from guild handicrafts to manufacture, and then from manufacture to large-scale industry, with steam and mechanical power, had caused the development of these two classes."

We see then, in the last analysis, that the motive forces of History are given us by the following chain:

- (a) History is the work of *men*.
- (b) *Action*, which makes History, is determined by their *will*.
- (c) This will is the expression of their *ideas*.
- (d) These ideas are the reflection of the *social conditions* in which they live.
- (e) It is the social conditions that determine the *classes* and their struggles.
- (f) The classes themselves are determined by the *economic conditions*.

In order to specify under what forms and in what conditions this chain unfolds, let us say that:

1. The *ideas* translate themselves into life on the *political plane*.
2. The *class struggle* which is found behind the ideas translates itself on the *social plane*.
3. The *economic conditions* translate themselves on the *economic plane*.

## CHAPTER II.

### WHENCE CAME CLASSES AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS ?

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1. The first great division of labour.
2. The first division of society into classes.
3. The second great division of labour.
4. The second division of society into classes.
5. What determines the economic conditions.
6. The modes of production.
7. Remarks.

We have seen that the motive forces of history are, in the final analysis, the classes and their struggles which are determined by economic conditions.

That is by the following chain of reasoning: Men have in their heads ideas which make them act. These ideas are born from the material conditions in which they live. These conditions of material existence are determined by the social position which they occupy in society, that is to say by the class to which they belong, and the classes are themselves determined by the economic conditions in which the society is developing. So then it is necessary to see what determines the economic conditions and the classes which they create. This is what we will now study.

## 1. The First Great Division of Labour

When we study the evolution of society and become aware of the facts of the past ages, we observe immediately that the division of society into classes has not always existed. Dialectics requires that we investigate the origins of things; now we observe that in the very distant past, there were no classes. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels tells us:

"In all the earlier stages of society, production was essentially in common; there was not a class, a category of workers, and another class. The consumption of the goods produced by men was also in common. That is *primitive communism*."

All the men take part in production, the individual tools are private property, but those used in common belong to the community. At this early stage the division of labour exists only between the *sexes*. The man hunts, fishes, etc.; the woman looks after the house. There are no particular or private interests at stake.

But man did not remain in that age and the primary fact at the root of the change in the life of men was the division of work in the social order.

"But the division of labour slowly insinuates itself into this process of production." (Engels, *ibid.*)

This comes into play where men

found animals which could be tamed and, when once tamed, bred. A number of the most advanced tribes . . . made raising cattle their chief work. Pastoral tribes separated themselves from the mass of other barbarians: *first great social division of labour.*" (Engels, *ibid.*)

The first mode of production was then hunting and fishing; the second mode of production, raising cattle,

which gave origin to tribes of shepherds. It is this first division of labour which is at the root of the:

## 2. First Division of Society into Classes

"The increase of production in all branches—cattle breeding, agriculture, domestic handicrafts—enabled human labour-power to produce more than was necessary for its maintenance. At the same time it increased the amount of work that daily fell to the lot of every member of the gens, household, community or single family. The addition of more labour power became desirable. This was furnished by war; captives were made slaves. Under the given general historical conditions, the first great social division of labour, by increasing the productivity of labour, that is, wealth, and enlarging the field of production, necessarily carried slavery in its wake. Out of the first great social division of labour arose the first great division of society, into two classes: masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited . . .

"This brings us to the threshold of civilisation . . . In the lowest stage, men produced only for their own direct needs; exchange was confined to sporadic cases when a surplus was accidentally obtained. In the middle stage of barbarism we find that the pastoral peoples had in their cattle a form of property . . . which created the conditions for regular exchange." (Engels, *ibid.*)

We have then at that moment two classes in society: masters and slaves. After that society was to continue to live and to undergo new developments. A new class was to be born and grow.

## 3. The Second Great Division of Labour

"Wealth increased rapidly, but it was the wealth of single individuals. Weaving, metal working and the other crafts which were becoming more and more specialised displayed increasing artistic finish in their products; agriculture now provided not only cereals, but also oil and wine . . . Such diverse activities could no longer be conducted by any single individual; the *second great*

*division of labour* took place; handicrafts separated from agriculture. The continued increase of production and with it the increased productivity of labour enhanced the value of human labour-power. Slavery now became an essential part of the social system . . . they were now driven in scores to work in the fields and workshops. The division of production into two great branches, agriculture and handicrafts, gave rise to production for exchange, the production of commodities; with it came trade . . .” (Ibid.)

#### 4. The Second Division of Society into Classes

Thus, the first great division of labour augments the value of human labour, creates an increase of wealth, which again augments the value of labour and compels a second division of labour; handicrafts and agriculture. At this moment, the continual increase of production and, parallel with it, of the value of human labour-power renders slaves indispensable, creates commodity production, and with it, a third class, *that of the merchants*.

We have then at this time in society a triple division of labour and three classes: cultivators, artisans, merchants. For the first time we see a class appear *which does not participate in production*, and this class, the merchant class, is going to dominate the two others.

“The upper stage of barbarism introduced a further division of labour between agriculture and handicrafts, resulting in the production of a continually increasing portion of commodities especially for exchange, so that exchange between individual producers reached the point where it became a *vital necessity* for society. Civilisation strengthened and increased all the established divisions of labour, particularly by intensifying the contrast between town and country . . . and added a third division of labour, peculiar to itself and of decisive importance: it created a class that took no part in production, but engaged exclusively in exchanging the products—*the merchants* . . .

“This class makes itself the indispensable intermediary between any two producers. Under the pretext . . . of thus becoming the most useful class in society it rapidly amasses enormous wealth and corresponding social influence . . . and gains increasing control over production, until they at last create a product of their own—periodic commercial crises.” (Engels, *ibid.*)

Now we see the chain which, starting from primitive communism, leads us to capitalism.

1. Primitive Communism.
2. Division between savage and pastoral tribes. (First division of labour, masters and slaves.)
3. Division between cultivators and artisans. (Second division of labour.)
4. Birth of the class of merchants. (Third division of labour) which
5. Engenders periodical trade crises (Capitalism).

Now we know where classes come from and it remains to us to study:

#### 5. What determines economic conditions

We must first very briefly pass in review the various social systems which have preceded us.

Documents are lacking for a detailed study of societies which preceded the ancient societies, but we know, for example, that with the ancient Greeks there were masters and slaves and that the merchant class was already beginning to develop. Next in the middle ages, the feudal society with its barons and serfs, permits merchants to assume ever-increasing importance. They group themselves near the castles, within the “*bourgs*” (market towns), hence the name “*bourgeois*”; on the other hand, in the middle ages, before capitalist production; there existed only petty production of which the primary condition was that the producer was the owner of his tools. The means of

production belonged to the individual and were suited only to individual use. In consequence they were paltry, small and limited. To concentrate and enlarge these means of production, to turn them into the powerful levers of modern production, was the historic role of capitalist production and the bourgeoisie . . .

"Since the 15th century the bourgeoisie has accomplished this work through the three historical phases; *simple co-operation, manufacture and large-scale industry*. By tearing the means of production from their isolation, by concentrating them . . . their very *nature* is changed and from individual they become *social*." (Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*.)

We see therefore that parallel to the evolution of the classes (masters and slaves, barons and serfs) there evolve the conditions of production, of circulation, of distribution: that is to say the economic conditions, and that this economic evolution follows step by step and parallel with the evolution of the modes of production. These, then, are:

## 6. The modes of production

Which determine the economic conditions.

"If, formerly, the forces of an individual or at most, of a family were enough to put to work the ancient isolated means of production, it now needed a whole battalion of workers to set going these concentrated means of production. Steam and the machine tool achieved and completed this metamorphosis . . . The individual workshop (is replaced by) the factory which demands the co-operation of hundreds and thousands of workers. Production is transformed from the series of individual acts that it was, into a social act." (Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*.)

There we see that the evolution of the *modes* of production has utterly transformed the productive *forces*. But if the tools of work have become collective, property has remained individual. Machines which can only function by putting to work a collectivity have

remained the property of one single man. Also we see that

"the productive forces increasingly compelling the recognition of their social character, that of social productive forces—they impose on great masses of the means of production their socialisation, which is manifested in the form of joint stock companies. This also is becoming insufficient. The state must assume the direction of these productive forces . . . the bourgeoisie has become superfluous. All the social functions of the capitalists are now carried out—by salaried employees." (F. Engels, *ibid.*)

Thus do the contradictions of the capitalist regime appear before us:

"On the one hand, perfecting of machinery made compulsory . . . by competition and complemented by a constantly growing displacement of labourers . . . On the other hand, unlimited extension of production is equally obligatory. On both sides, unheard of development of the productive forces, excess of supply over demand, over-production, crises . . . which brings us to an excess of production . . . and an excess of labourers without employment, without means of existence." (F. Engels, *ibid.*)

There is a contradiction between labour which has become social, collective, and property which has remained individual. And so with Marx we say:

"From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. *Then comes the period of social revolution*" (Karl Marx, Preface to *Critique of Political Economy*.)

"A second feature of production is that its changes and development always begin with changes and development of the productive forces, and in the first place, with changes and development of the instruments of production. Productive forces are therefore the most mobile and revolutionary element of production. First the productive forces of society change and develop, and then, depending on these changes and in conformity with them, men's relations of production, their economic relations change. This, however, does not mean that the relations of production do not influence the development of the productive forces and that the latter are not dependent on the former.

While their development is dependent on the development of the productive forces, the relations of production in their turn react upon the development of the productive forces, accelerating or retarding it. In this connection it should be noted that the relations of production cannot for too long a time lag behind and be in a state of contradiction to the growth of the productive forces, inasmuch as the productive forces can develop in full measure only when the relations of production correspond to the character, the state of the productive forces and allow full scope for their development. Therefore, however much the relations of production may lag behind the development of the productive forces, they must, sooner or later, come into correspondence with—and actually do come into correspondence with—the level of development of the productive forces, the character of the productive forces. Otherwise we would have a fundamental violation of the unity of the productive forces and the relations of production within the system of production, a disruption of production as a whole, a crisis of production, a destruction of productive forces.

“An instance in which the relations of production do not correspond to the character of the productive forces, conflict with them, is the economic crises in capitalist countries, where private capitalist ownership of the means of production is in glaring incongruity with the social character of the process of production, with the character of the productive forces. This results in economic crises, which lead to the destruction of productive forces. Furthermore, this incongruity itself constitutes the economic basis of social revolution, the purpose of which is to destroy the existing relations of production and to create new relations of production corresponding to the character of the productive forces.

“In contrast, an instance in which the relations of production completely correspond to the character of the productive forces is the Socialist national economy of the U.S.S.R., where the social ownership of the means of production fully corresponds to the social character of the process of production, and where, because of this, economic crises and the destruction of productive forces are unknown.

“Consequently, the productive forces are not only the most mobile and revolutionary element in production,

but are also the determining element in the development of production.

“Whatever are the productive forces such must be the relations of production.

“While the state of the productive forces furnishes an answer to the question—with what instruments of production do men produce the material values they need?—the state of the relations of production furnishes the answer to another question—who owns the means of production (the land, forests, waters, mineral resources, raw materials, instruments of production, production premises, means of transportation and communication, etc.), who commands the means of production, whether the whole of society, or individual persons, groups, or classes which utilize them for the exploitation of other persons, groups or classes?” (Stalin, *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*.)\*

## 7. Remarks

Before ending this chapter, it is necessary to make some remarks and to emphasise that, in this study, we find again all the characteristics and laws of the dialectics that we have just studied. In effect, we have just very rapidly run through the history of social systems, of classes and of modes of production. We see how each part of these studies depends on the others. We observe that this history is essentially one of motion and that the changes which take place at each stage of the evolution of societies are evoked by an internal struggle, a struggle between the conservative and the progressive elements, a struggle which ends in the destruction of each society and the birth of a new one. Each society has a character and a structure which is markedly other than those of the society that preceded it. These radical transformations occur after an accumulation of facts which in themselves appear insignificant, but which, at a certain moment,

\*Inserted by Australian Editor.

create by their accumulation an actual situation which evokes a harsh revolutionary change.

We therefore meet again here the characteristics and the great general laws of dialectics, to wit:

- The interdependence of things and facts.
- Dialectical motion and change.
- Autodynamism.
- Contradiction.
- Reciprocal action.
- And evolution by leaps (transformation of quantity into quality).

#### READING

Engels: *Socialism—Utopian and Scientific.*

Engels: *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.*

#### QUESTIONS

##### CHAPTER I.

1. What explanation of History do the idealists give?
2. What is Historical Materialism?
3. What was the position of the 18th century materialists in the explanation of history? Show its insufficiency.

##### CHAPTER II.

1. Where do classes come from?
2. What are the motive forces of History?

## PART VI.

# DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AND IDEOLOGIES

CHAPTER I.  
APPLICATION OF THE DIALECTICAL  
METHOD TO IDEOLOGIES

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1. What is the importance of ideologies to Marxism?
2. What is an ideology? The ideological factor and ideological forms.
3. Economic structure and ideological structure.
4. True and false consciousness.
5. Action and reaction of the ideological factors.
6. Method of Dialectical Analysis.
7. Necessity of ideological struggle.
8. Conclusion.

1. **What is the importance of ideologies to Marxism?**

It is often said that Marxism is a materialist philosophy which denies the role of ideas in history, which denies the role of the ideological factor and wants to consider economic influences solely.

That is false. Marxism does not deny the important role that intelligence, art and ideas play in life. Quite on the contrary, it attaches particular importance to the forms of ideology and we are going to end this study of the elementary principles of Marxism by examining how the method of Dialectical Materialism is applied to the ideologies; we will see what is the role of ideologies in history, the action of the ideological *factor* and what is the ideological *form*.

This part of Marxism that we are about to study is the least known part of this philosophy. The reason for this is that for a long time the part of Marxism dealing with Political Economy has been preponderantly dealt with and propagated. By acting thus, this subject was arbitrarily severed not only from the great whole that Marxism forms, but it was also severed from its bases; for what has permitted Political Economy to be made a veritable science, is Historical Materialism, which is, as we have seen, an application of Dialectical Materialism.

In passing, it may be indicated that this style of procedure is derived from the metaphysical way of thinking that we know and of which we have to take so much trouble to rid ourselves. Let us repeat that it is to the extent that we isolate things or that we study them in a one-sided fashion, that we make mistakes.

The bad interpretations of Marxism arise then from lack of emphasis on the role of ideologies in history and in life. They have been separated from Marxism and by doing this, Marxism is separated from Dialectical Materialism, that is to say from itself!

## 2. What is an ideology? (The ideological factor and forms of ideology)

We are going to commence this chapter, which is devoted to the role of ideologies, by a few definitions.

What is it that we call an ideology? Ideology means, above all, *idea*. An ideology is a collection of ideas which forms a whole, a theory or even sometimes simply a state of mind.

Marxism is an ideology which forms a whole and which supplies a method of solution for all problems. A republican ideology is the collection of ideas that are to be found in the mind of a republican.

However an ideology is not merely a collection of pure ideas that are supposed to be severed from all sentiment (which is a metaphysical conception); an ideology necessarily bears with it sentiments, feelings, sympathies, antipathies, hopes, fears, etc. In the proletarian ideology we find the concepts of the class struggle, but we also find feelings of solidarity with those exploited by capitalism, with those imprisoned for their resistance to exploitation, rebellious feelings and enthusiasm, etc. . . . It is all that which makes an ideology.

Let us now see what is called the *ideological factor*; it is ideology considered as a cause or force which acts, which is capable of influencing people and that is why people speak of the *action of the ideological factor*. The religions, for example, are an ideological factor of which we must take account; they have a moral force which still acts in an important manner.

What is meant by an *ideological form*? This is designated a collection of particular ideas, which form an ideology in a specialised domain. Religion and morality are forms of ideology, the same is true of science, philosophy, literature, art, poetry.

If then we want to examine what is the historical role of ideology in general and of all its forms in particular, we will conduct this study not by separating ideology from history, that is to say from the life of society, but by studying the role of ideology, its factors and its forms within and starting from society.

## 3. Economic Structure and Ideological Structure

We saw when we studied Historical Materialism that the history of societies is explained by the following linking up: Men make history by their action, the expression of their will. Their will is determined

by their ideas. We saw that what explains the ideas of men, their ideology, is the social environment in which men are divided into classes which are in their turn determined by the economic factor, that is to say, in the final reckoning, by the mode of production.

We have also seen that *between* the ideological factor and the social factor is to be found the political factor which manifests itself in the ideological struggle as the expression of the social struggle.

If then we examine the structure of society in the light of Historical Materialism, we see that the economic structure is the foundation, then above this, the social structure, which supports the political structure, and finally the ideological structure.

We see that, for materialists, the ideological structure is the culmination, the summit of the social edifice, while, for the idealists, the ideological structure is the foundation.

"In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness [that is to say forms of ideology]. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life." (Karl Marx, Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*.)

Consequently we see that it is the economic structure which is the foundation of society. It is also termed the infrastructure (which signifies lower structure.)

Ideology which includes all the forms: morality, religion, science, poetry, art, literature, constitutes the supra- or superstructure (which signifies: structure which is at the top).

Knowing, as is demonstrated by the materialist theory, that ideas are the reflection of things, that it is our social existence which determines our consciousness, we will therefore say that the superstructure is the reflection of the infrastructure.

Engels demonstrates this clearly in the following example:

"Calvin's creed was one fit for the boldest of the bourgeoisie of his time. His predestination doctrine was the religious expression of the fact that in the commercial world of competition success or failure does not depend upon a man's activity or cleverness, but upon circumstances uncontrollable by him. It is not of him that willeth or of him that runneth, but of the mercy of unknown superior economic powers; and this was especially true at a period of economic revolution, when all old commercial routes and centres were replaced by new ones, when India and America were opened to the world, and when even the most sacred economic articles of faith—the value of gold and silver—began to totter and to break down." (F. Engels, Preface to *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*.)

In reality what happens to the merchants in economic life? They are in competition. The merchants, the bourgeois have had full experience of this competition where there are conquerors and conquered. Very often, the smartest, the most intelligent are beaten in the competition, by a crisis which supervenes and beats them down. This crisis is for them an unforeseeable thing; it seems to them a blow from fate, and it is this idea that sometimes the least cunning survive the crisis, quite without reason, which is carried over into the Protestant religion. It is this observation that certain people succeed by chance, which supplies the idea of *predestination* according to which men must suffer a fate fixed by God from all eternity.

We see in this example of the reflection of economic conditions in what manner the superstructure is the reflection of the infrastructure.

Here is still another example: Take the mentality

of two workers, not members of trade unions, that is to say not politically developed. One works in a very large factory where the work is rationalised, the other works for a small tradesman. It is certain each will have a different idea of the employer. For one, the employer will be the harsh exploiter, characteristic of capitalism; the other will regard his employer as a worker, comfortably off certainly, but a worker and not a tyrant.

It is indeed the reflection of their working conditions which will determine their conception of the employing class.

This example, which is important, leads us, in order to be precise, to make some remarks.

#### 4. True Consciousness and False Consciousness

We have just said that the ideologies are the reflection of the material conditions of society, that it is the social existence which determines the social consciousness. One might deduce from that that a proletarian must *automatically* have a proletarian ideology. But such a supposition does not correspond to the reality, since there are some workers who have not a worker's consciousness.

There is then a distinction to be made; people may live in definite conditions but the consciousness that they have of it may not correspond to the reality. That is what Engels terms "having a false consciousness."

Example: Certain workers are under the influence of a doctrine of guilds, which is a reversion towards the middle ages, towards the age of handicraft. In this case, there is a consciousness of the poverty of the workers, but it is not a correct, true consciousness. The ideology here is indeed a reflection of the con-

ditions of social life but it is not a faithful, an exact reflection.

In people's consciousness, the reflection is very often "inside out." To observe the fact of poverty, is a reflection of social conditions, but reflection becomes false when it is thought that a return to guilds would solve the problem. We see then in this case a partly true, partly false consciousness.

The worker who is a monarchist also has a consciousness at once true and false. True because he wants to remove the poverty that he sees; false because he thinks a king can do that. And simply because he has reasoned badly, because he has chosen his ideology badly, this worker may become for us an enemy of our class while he is still a member of our class. So, to have a false consciousness means to deceive oneself or to be deceived upon one's real condition.

We will say, therefore, that ideology is the reflection of the conditions of existence, but that it is not a *preordained* reflection.

It is moreover necessary for us to observe that everything possible is done to give us a false consciousness and to strengthen the influence of the ideology of the ruling classes on the exploited classes. The very first elements of an idea of life that we receive, the education, the instruction given us, graft a false consciousness on us. Our connections in life, a rural background in some, propaganda, press, radio, etc., often make our consciousness false.

In consequence, ideological work has, therefore, extreme importance for us who are Marxists. The false consciousness must be *destroyed* to acquire a true consciousness, and without ideological work, this transformation cannot be realised.

Those who deem and say that Marxism is a fatalist doctrine are therefore wrong, since we in truth consider

that the ideologies play a great role in society and that it is necessary to teach and to learn this philosophy in order that it may be an efficient instrument and effective weapon.

## 5. Action and Reaction of the Ideological Factors

By the examples of true and false consciousness we have seen that we must not always want to explain ideas solely by the economic facts and so deny that ideas have an influence. To do so would be to interpret Marxism in a wrong fashion. Ideas certainly are explained in the first analysis by the economic facts, but they also act in their own way.

“According to the materialist conception of history the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence, if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure . . . also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*. There is an interaction of all these elements, in which, amid all the endless host of accidents, the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary.” (Letter to J. Bloch by F. Engels.)

We see then that we must examine *everything* before looking into the economic conditions, and that if these in the final analysis are the cause, we must always remember that they are not the *sole* cause.

The ideologies are the *reflections* and the *effects* of economic conditions, but the relation between the two is not simple for we also observe a *reciprocal action of the ideologies* on the infrastructure.

This was well shown in the mass movement that developed in France after February 6th, 1934. We will now study it under two aspects at least.

1. Some explain this surge by saying that its cause was the economic crisis. This is a materialist explanation, but it is one-sided. This explanation takes account of only one factor: economic in this case, the crisis.

2. This reasoning is then partly correct. But to this explanation there must be added another factor, viz., what the *people are thinking*: the ideology. Now the people in this mass movement were anti-fascists. That is the ideological factor. And if the people were anti-fascists, it was thanks to the propaganda which gave birth to the Popular Front. But for the effectiveness of this propaganda, suitable soil was needed, what could be done in 1936 was not possible in 1932. Finally we know how, in the outcome, this mass movement in its turn, influenced economic conditions by the class struggle it unleashed. We see then, in this example, that an ideology which is the reflection of social conditions, in its turn becomes a *cause* of events.

“Political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development is based on economic development. But all these react upon one another and also upon the economic base. It is not that the economic condition is the *cause and alone active*, while everything else only has a passive effect. There is, rather, interaction on the basis of the economic necessity, which *ultimately* always asserts itself.” (F. Engels. Letter to H. Starkenburg.)

It is thus, for example, that

“The basis of the law of inheritance—assuming that the stages reached in the development of the family are equal—is an economic one. But it would be difficult to prove, for instance, that the absolute liberty of the testator in England and the severe restrictions imposed upon him in France are only due in every detail to economic causes. Both reach back, however, on the

economic sphere to a very considerable extent, because they influence the division of property." (F. Engels, Letter to Conrad Schmidt.)

To take a more immediate example, let us take up again that of taxes. We all have our opinions on taxes. The rich wish to be freed of them, and therefore support indirect taxes; the workers and the middle class on the contrary want a system of taxation based on direct and progressive taxation (income tax).

So then, the ideas that we have on taxes and which are ideological factors, have their source in our economic situation which is created and imposed on us by capitalism. The rich desire to retain their privileges and fight for the retention of the present mode of taxation, and for the strengthening of the laws for that purpose. Now these laws, which come from ideas, react on economic conditions, for they kill small retail trade and tradesmen and hasten capitalist concentration.

Consequently, we see that economic conditions engender ideas, but that ideas also engender modifications in the economic conditions, and it is by taking account of this *reciprocity of relations* that we should examine ideologies, all the ideologies; and it is only in the final analysis, at the root, that we see economic necessity always prevail.

We know that it is the thinkers and writers who have the mission of propagating, if not of defending the ideologies. Their thoughts and their writings are not always well marked, but, in fact, even in writings which have the air of simple stories or novels, an analysis will always reveal an underlying ideology. This analysis is a very delicate task, and we must do it with care. We are going to outline a method of dialectical analysis which will be a great help; however, care must be taken not to apply it mechanically and not to try to explain the inexplicable.

## 6. Method of Dialectical Analysis

Much knowledge is needed for the proper application of the dialectical method, and if one does not know the subject which is in question, it must be given detailed study, lacking this, the inevitable result will be an absurd caricature of a judgment.

For the dialectical analysis of a book or a literary narrative we will outline a method which can also be applied to other subjects.

(a) Primary attention must be paid to the *content* of the book or story that is to be analysed. Examine it independently of all social questions, for everything does not originate in the class struggle and in economic conditions.

There are literary influences and we must take note of these. Try to see to which "literary school" the work belongs. Take into account the internal development of the ideologies. For practical purposes, it would be well to make a summary of the work to be analysed, and to note the most striking points.

(b) Next observe the social types which are the leading figures in the plot. *Find what class* they belong to, examine the actions of the characters and see if in any way, what happens in the novel can be linked up with a social point of view.

If that is impossible, if it cannot reasonably be done, it is better to abandon the analysis than to invent it. An explanation must *never* be invented.

(c) When one has found what are the classes in question, the economic base must be sought, that is to say what are the means of production and the mode of producing at the period when the action in the novel takes place.

If, for example, the action takes place in our days, capitalism is the economic base. At the present time many stories and novels appear which criticise and combat capitalism. However there are two ways of opposing capitalism:

1. As a revolutionary who marches forward.
2. As a reactionary, desiring to return to the past, and it is often this form that is to be found in modern novels: in them former times are regretted.

(d) Once we have the results of the above, we can then look for the *ideology*, that is to say the ideas, the sentiments, the author's mode of thought. The ideology will be considered then as to the role it plays, its influence on the mind of the readers of the book.

(e) We will now be able to give the *conclusions* from our analysis, to say *why* such a tale or novel has been written at *such a time*.

This method of analysis can only be effective if one remembers, in applying it, all that has been said in the preceding chapters. It must be remembered that Dialectics, if it bring us a new way of conceiving things, also requires that we have a good knowledge of things which is indispensable if we are to speak of them and analyse them. Consequently, now that we have seen what our method consists of, we must try, in our studies, in our militant and personal life, to see things in their motion, in their changing, and not in a stationary, motionless state, and see them and also study them in all their aspects and not in a one-sided fashion. In short, apply everywhere and always the dialectical spirit.

## 7. The Necessity of Ideological Struggle

Now we know better what dialectical materialism is, the modern form of materialism, founded by Marx and Engels and developed by Lenin. In this work we have made use above all of texts from Marx and Engels; we cannot however end this course without specially indicating that the philosophic work of Lenin is considerable. That is why to-day one speaks of Marxism-Leninism.

*Marxism-Leninism and Dialectical Materialism are indissolubly united*, and it is only knowledge of dialectical materialism which will enable us to measure all the extent, the whole reach and all the wealth of Marxism-Leninism. That is why we must say that *the militant is not truly ideologically armed unless he knows this doctrine fully*.

The bourgeoisie, who well understand this, use every possible means, every possible effort to introduce their own ideology into the consciousness of the workers. Well knowing that, of all the aspects of Marxism-Leninism, it is Dialectical Materialism which is actually the least known, the bourgeoisie have organised a conspiracy of silence against it. It is painful to think that official education neglects and ignores dialectical materialism and that in the schools and universities, teaching is continued in the same fashion as a hundred years ago.

If, in former times, the metaphysical method had the upper hand of the dialectical method, it was, as we have seen, by reason of men's ignorance. To-day science has given us the means of demonstrating that the dialectical method is the one which it is proper to apply in scientific investigations and it is scandalous that our children continue to learn, to study, with a method which issued from ignorance.

Though scientists, in their researches, can no longer work on their special subject, without taking account of the interpenetration of the sciences, thereby applying unconsciously a part of dialectics, they still too often bring to their work a mental attitude in which they have been trained and which is metaphysical.

The great scientists who have already given so much to humanity—take for example Pasteur and Branly, who were idealists, believers—what great advances would they not have made or been enabled to make, if they had had a dialectical training!

But there is a kind of struggle against Marxism which is still more dangerous than the campaign of silence. It is the falsifications that the bourgeoisie attempts to organise precisely within the working class movement. At this moment we see numerous “theoreticians” flourishing who represent themselves as “Marxists” and who claim to “renew” to “rejuvenate” Marxism. *Campaigns of this sort very often choose as their fulcrum the less known aspects of Marxism, particularly Dialectical Materialism.*

Thus, for example, there are people who declare that they accept Marxism as a conception of revolutionary action, but not as a general conception of the universe. They declare that they can be perfectly Marxist without accepting the materialist philosophy. In conformity with these attitudes, various attempts are made at smuggling in ideas. Some folk, who say they are still Marxists, want to introduce into Marxism ideas which are incompatible with the very basis of Marxism, that is to say with the materialist philosophy. Attempts of this kind have been known in the past. It was against them that Lenin wrote his book, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. At this actual minute, in this wide diffusion of Marxism there is a rebirth and

multiplication of these attempts. How could those who attack Marxism precisely on its philosophic aspect, be recognised and unmasked, if the true philosophy of Marxism is not known?

### 8. Conclusion

Happily, for some years now, a powerful urge to study the whole of Marxism has been visible, particularly in the working class; and an increasing interest precisely in the study of the materialist philosophy. This is a sign that indicates in the present situation that the working class has perfectly felt the justice of the reasons which we gave at the beginning, in favour of the study of the materialist philosophy. The workers have learnt, by their own experience, the necessity of uniting theory to practice, and at the same time the necessity of pushing theoretical study as far as possible. Every militant is in duty bound to strengthen this tendency and give it correct guidance and content. We are glad to see that thanks to the Workers' University at Paris, several thousands of men have learnt what Dialectical Materialism is, and, if that gives notable honour to our struggle against the bourgeoisie by showing *on which side* science stands, it also indicates our duty. *We must study.* Marxism must be known and made known everywhere. Parallel to the struggle on the streets and at the workplace, the militants must lead the ideological struggle. It is their duty to defend our ideology against all attacks, whatever form they take, and at the same time to lead the *counter-offensive* for the destruction of the bourgeois ideology in the minds of the workers. But to master all sides of this struggle, one must be armed. The militant can only be truly armed by knowledge of

Dialectical Materialism. 'This is an essential part of our duty till we have built a classless society where nothing will hinder the development of the sciences.

FINIS.

## QUESTIONS

1. Is it true that Marxism denies the role of ideas?
2. What are the different factors which condition and constitute the structure of society?
3. Analyse a newspaper story by the method of dialectical materialism.

## WRITTEN EXERCISE

(General Recapitulation)

What advantage have you gained for thought and action from the study of dialectical materialism?