

5. THE THEORETICAL STRUGGLE AGAINST THE REVISIONISTS DURING THE EBB TIDE OF THE REVOLUTION

THE REVISIONIST PHILOSOPHY OF "MUTINY ON ONE'S KNEES"

After the failure of the revolution of 1905-07, Russia went through the period of Stolypin reaction. In December 1907, Lenin again went abroad and lived in Geneva. Although the revolution had sustained a temporary setback, Lenin was full of confidence in the strength of the working class and believed that a new revolution was inevitable. As early as March 1906, he said, "The revolution lies buried. It is being eaten by worms. But revolution has the power of speedy resurrection and of blossoming forth again on well-prepared soil."¹ In the first article he wrote after arriving in Geneva, Lenin said:

We knew how to work during the long years preceding the revolution. Not for nothing do they say we are as hard as rock. The Social-Democrats have built a proletarian party which will not be disheartened by the failure of the first armed onslaught, will not lose its head, nor be carried away by adventures. That party is marching to socialism, without tying itself or

¹"The Victory of the Cadets and the Tasks of the Workers' Party", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 10, p. 219.

its future to the outcome of any particular period of bourgeois revolutions. That is precisely why it is also free of the weaker aspects of bourgeois revolution. And this proletarian party is marching to victory.¹

While abroad Lenin published the periodical *Proletary* as a medium for rallying, uniting and educating the Bolshevik cadres, in preparation for the new revolutionary tide.

During this period, counter-revolution waged its offensive on the ideological front as well. A horde of fashionable writers appeared who attacked Marxism, mocked the revolution and extolled treachery. Some intellectual "fellow-travellers" were disheartened; they went downhill and then degenerated and, forming a broad united front with the international revisionists and the bourgeois philosophers, undertook a "campaign" against the theoretical foundations of Marxism, i.e., against dialectical and historical materialism.

In 1908, such Russian Social-Democrats as Bogdanov, Yushkevich and others published a series of books including *Studies in the Philosophy of Marxism, Materialism and Critical Realism, Dialectics in the Light of the Modern Theory of Knowledge* and *The Philosophical Constructions of Marxism*. They tried to use the empirio-criticism of Mach and Avenarius (that is, Machism) to "revise" Marxist philosophy; they regarded the most reactionary philosophical theories as fashionable, so that Kantianism, Humism and even Berkeleianism all became "recent" philosophy, replacing Marxist philosophy. They said that "belief" in the existence of the external world was mysticism, and that Engels' dialectics was also mysti-

¹"Political Notes", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 13, p. 446.

cism; they even declared that the proletariat needed its own "religion" and "deity". These people, who had in fact completely renounced dialectical materialism, employed endless subterfuges, not daring openly and plainly to oppose the views they had abandoned. Lenin said, "This is truly 'mutiny on one's knees'. . . . This is typical philosophical revisionism. . . ." ¹ In his letters to Gorky and others, Lenin sharply described the philosophical works of the revisionists as "absurd, harmful, philistine, priestly, *all of it*, from beginning to end, from the branches to the root — to Mach and Avenarius" ²

It became particularly urgent to expose the enemies of Marxism and destroy their philosophical absurdities. At the same time, the revolution had roused new strata to political activity; many new workers joined the Party and they could not possibly acquire a firm Marxist world outlook overnight. In the circumstances, theoretical struggle was put in the foreground. Lenin said:

It is not by mere chance that the period of social and political reaction, the period when the rich lessons of the revolution are being "digested", is also the period when the fundamental theoretical, including the philosophical, problems are of prime importance to any *living* trend. ³

In the course of this struggle, Lenin undertook an immense amount of theoretical work and completed his

¹ "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 14, p. 20.

² "Letter to A. M. Gorky", *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 34, p. 338.

³ "Those Who Would Liquidate Us", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 17, p. 76.

well-known philosophical work, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Here, using the dialectical- and historical-materialist approach, Lenin generalized revolutionary experience and all that was valuable and essential in the achievements of science in the whole historical period following the death of Engels, and demolished the various pseudo-Marxist, reactionary philosophical trends which were prevalent at the time.

FROM KANT TO HUME AND BERKELEY

Machism held that the world consists of "complexes of sensations" and that the existence of anything else other than sensations was beyond the knowledge of man. Lenin pointed out that the starting-point and the fundamental premise of this philosophy was subjective idealism, and that it led to the absurdity of solipsism, to admitting the existence of only the philosophizing individual. Criticizing Machist agnosticism, Lenin showed that things exist independently of our consciousness, independently of our perceptions, outside of us; that there definitely is not, nor can there be, any difference in principle between the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself — there is only the difference between what is known and what is not yet known; and that knowledge emerges from ignorance and incomplete, inexact knowledge becomes more complete and more exact. Knowledge was a process that was made up of many aspects and went through many stages, each particular stage being marked by relativity but also having the seeds of absolute truth. Lenin said:

Human thought then by its nature is capable of giving, and does give, absolute truth, which is com-

pounded of a sum-total of relative truths. Each step in the development of science adds new grains to the sum of absolute truth, but the limits of the truth of each scientific proposition are relative, now expanding, now shrinking with the growth of knowledge.¹

Practice is the criterion of truth. Our perceptions and ideas, said Lenin, are the images of things, and practice is the test of these images and distinguishes a true from a false image. The placing of the criterion of practice at the basis of the theory of knowledge inevitably leads to materialism, sweeping aside the endless fabrications of professorial scholasticism.

Both Mach and Avenarius began their philosophical careers in the seventies of the previous century, when the fashionable cry in German professorial circles was "Back to Kant". And, indeed, both founders of empirio-criticism started from Kant in their philosophical "development". Mach said:

His [Kant's] critical idealism was, as I acknowledge with the deepest gratitude, the starting-point of all my critical thought. But I found it impossible to remain faithful to it. Very soon I began to return to the views of Berkeley . . . [and then] arrived at views akin to those of Hume. . . .²

The Machist disciples, Bogdanov and Co., were far less outspoken than their teacher. On the one hand they willfully departed from the philosophical basis of Marxism, while on the other, using ambiguous language they

¹"Materialism and Empirio-Criticism", *op. cit.*, p. 135.

²Quoted by Lenin in "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism", *op. cit.*, p. 194.

mixed up right and wrong. They alleged that they were "also" Marxists philosophically, that they "almost" saw eye to eye with Marx, and that they had only "supplemented" his teachings a little.

CAN NEW DISCOVERIES IN NATURAL SCIENCE NEGATE THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF MARXISM?

The Machists boasted that their philosophy was "the philosophy of twentieth-century natural science". But in fact their only connection with it was with one backward school of natural science. In the late 19th century and at the beginning of the present century, natural science, particularly physics, made a series of great achievements which shook certain outdated ideas of traditional physics. It was in these circumstances that some natural scientists who did not understand dialectics lapsed into idealism by way of relativism. Because of the discovery of electrons they said that "matter has disappeared", that there existed "motion without matter" and that scientific principles were just a number of "marks or signs", and so forth. These scientists had their counterparts in the Machists, who used these absurd arguments to negate philosophical materialism. Lenin pointed out that what had vanished was not matter itself but the limits within which we had hitherto known matter; that certain properties of matter which had seemed "absolute" to traditional physics were now revealed to be relative; that the fact that matter was an objective reality existing outside of the mind was absolute, and that electrons or any other new discoveries could not alter this fact. Lenin also said that the developments in mod-

ern physics would inevitably lead to the only true philosophy of natural science — dialectical materialism — not directly but by a zigzag route. He said:

Modern physics is in travail; it is giving birth to dialectical materialism. The process of child-birth is painful. And in addition to a living healthy being, there are bound to be produced certain dead products, refuse fit only for the garbage-heap. And the entire school of physical idealism, the entire empirio-critical philosophy, together with empirio-symbolism, empirio-monism, and so on, and so forth, must be regarded as such refuse!¹

YOU CANNOT JUDGE A MAN, OR A PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOL, BY THE OUTSIDE LABEL

Machism claimed to rise above materialism and idealism and to be a non-partisan philosophy. Lenin said:

A red thread that runs through *all* the writings of *all* the Machists is the stupid claim to have “risen above” materialism and idealism, to have transcended this “obsolete” antithesis; but *in fact* this whole fraternity is *continually* sliding into idealism and it conducts a steady and incessant struggle against materialism.²

He showed that the choice was either materialism, consistent to the end, or the falsehood and confusion of idealism — there was no third choice. The so-called non-partisanship in philosophy was nothing but a brazen attempt

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

² *Ibid.*, p. 341.

to cloak a slavish adherence to idealism and fideism. Philosophy was a partisan science. The bourgeois professors of philosophy were the learned salesmen of the theologians. Class struggle and class ideology were concealed behind the abstract disquisitions of the Machist theory of knowledge, while the objective role of the Machists was to serve the forces of reaction. Lenin said:

Marx and Engels were partisans in philosophy from start to finish, they were able to detect the deviations from materialism and concessions to idealism and fideism in every one of the “recent” trends.¹

The struggle between different parties in the field of philosophy “in the last analysis reflects the tendencies and ideology of the antagonistic classes in modern society”.²

The revisionists of all types styled themselves Marxists. But Lenin pointed out that a man should be judged not by what he says or by how he views himself but by his actions. A philosopher should be judged not by the label he gives himself but by how in practice he solves basic theoretical problems, what kind of people he joins up with and what he has taught and is teaching his disciples and followers.

Using this criterion Lenin made the following general appraisal of empirio-criticism: 1) empirio-criticism is thoroughly reactionary in character on the whole problem of the theory of knowledge, using new artifices, terms and subtleties to disguise the old errors of idealism and agnosticism; 2) both Mach and Avenarius started out from Kant but they moved, not in the direction of materialism but in the opposite direction, towards Hume and

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

² *Ibid.*, p. 358.

Berkeley. Their philosophy is simply one of the many schools of bourgeois philosophy, inheriting the line of subjective idealism and agnosticism; 3) this philosophy is related to one particular school of modern natural science, namely, reactionary physical idealism; 4) this philosophy is partisan, and its objective, class function is to serve the fideists faithfully in their struggle against dialectical and historical materialism.

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN MARXISM AND REVISIONISM
IS THE PRELUDE TO THE GREAT REVOLUTIONARY
BATTLES OF THE PROLETARIAT

Lenin published his *Marxism and Revisionism* in April 1908, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Marx's death. In this well-known article, Lenin explained the social roots of revisionism, systematically revealed the content and essence of the revisionist trend and showed how important for the proletariat in its fight for emancipation was the struggle against revisionism.

Lenin showed that the revisionists were hostile to Marxism and that they had revised Marxist revolutionary theory all along the line in philosophy, political economy and the theory of the class struggle.

In the sphere of philosophy, the revisionists clung to the skirts of the bourgeois professors, mumbling that materialism had been refuted long ago and replacing "artful" (and revolutionary) dialectics by "simple" (and tranquil) evolution.

In the sphere of political economy, seizing on "new data on economic development" the revisionists attacked the Marxist theory of value, the theory of economic crisis under capitalism and the theory of the inevitable collapse

of capitalism, and spread the idea that there was a tendency for class antagonisms to become milder. Lenin resolutely refuted these absurdities, saying that the revisionists sinned by making generalizations based on facts selected one-sidedly, without reference to the system of capitalism as a whole. He said:

Only for a very short time could people, and then only the most short-sighted, think of refashioning the foundations of Marx's theory under the influence of a few years of industrial boom and prosperity. Realities very soon made it clear to the revisionists that crises were not a thing of the past: prosperity was followed by a crisis. The forms, the sequence, the picture of particular crises changed, but crises remained an inevitable component of the capitalist system. While uniting production, the cartels and trusts at the same time, and in a way that was obvious to all, aggravated the anarchy of production, the insecurity of existence of the proletariat and the oppression of capital, thereby intensifying class antagonisms to an unprecedented degree. That capitalism is heading for a break-down . . . has been made particularly clear, and on a particularly large scale, precisely by the new giant trusts.¹

In the sphere of politics, the revisionists tried to revise the very foundation of Marxism, namely, the theory of the class struggle. They asserted that since the "will of the majority" prevailed under democracy, one must not regard the state as an organ of class rule. Lenin averred that this was identical with the view of the bourgeois liberals. He said:

¹"Marxism and Revisionism", *Collected Works*, Moscow; Vol. 15, pp. 35-36.

The whole history of Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the whole history of the Russian revolution in the early twentieth, clearly show how absurd such views are. Economic distinctions are not mitigated but aggravated and intensified under the freedom of "democratic" capitalism. Parliamentarism does not eliminate, but lays bare the innate character even of the most democratic bourgeois republics as organs of class oppression.¹

Lenin characterized the substance of revisionist policy in the following words:

A natural complement to the economic and political tendencies of revisionism was its attitude to the ultimate aim of the socialist movement. "The movement is everything, the ultimate aim is nothing" — this catch-phrase of Bernstein's expresses the substance of revisionism better than many long disquisitions. To determine its conduct from case to case, to adapt itself to the events of the day and to the chopping and changing of petty politics, to forget the primary interests of the proletariat and the basic features of the whole capitalist system, of all capitalist evolution, to sacrifice these primary interests for the real or assumed advantages of the moment — such is the policy of revisionism.²

Lenin placed a high value on the significance for the proletarian revolution of the theoretical struggle which the Marxists were waging against the revisionists. He said that what they experienced then in the struggle

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

against those who tried to "revise" the theories of Marx was bound to be experienced by the working class on an incomparably larger scale. He declared:

The ideological struggle waged by revolutionary Marxism against revisionism at the end of the nineteenth century is but the prelude to the great revolutionary battles of the proletariat, which is marching forward to the complete victory of its cause despite all the waverings and weaknesses of the petty bourgeoisie.¹

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.