

On Studying Some History of Philosophy

by Tang Hsiao-wen

CALLING on senior cadres of our Party to study Marxist-Leninist works seriously, Chairman Mao has pointed out that they should read some books on philosophical history, including the history of Chinese and European philosophy. This instruction is very important for us in learning to observe and analyse things from a dialectical and historical materialist point of view and making a deep criticism of all kinds of idealism and metaphysics.

Two Opposing Camps on Philosophical Front

The struggle between materialism and idealism and between dialectics and metaphysics runs through the entire history of philosophy. For thousands of years philosophical history shows that all philosophical trends of thought and schools are either materialist or idealist, either dialectical or metaphysical, no matter what characteristics of the times they may possess or forms they may assume under different historical conditions. The two opposing camps in philosophy have always reflected the clash of interests between antagonistic classes. Through the ages, an important aspect of all reactionary classes' attacks on the revolutionary classes is to oppose materialism and dialectics with idealism and metaphysics. Society's acute and complex class struggles are inevitably reflected in the philosophical realm as acute and complex struggles between materialism and idealism and between dialectics and metaphysics. Such struggles will continue to exist after the proletariat has won state power. To regain their lost "paradise," the overthrown exploiting classes invariably use idealism and metaphysics as the foundation for creating public opinion in their favour.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, instigated and supported by Liu Shao-chi and his gang, renegades, enemy agents and bourgeois representatives who have sneaked into the Party launched one attack after another against Marxist philosophy. They hoped in this way to create public opinion for the restoration of capitalism. By studying philosophical history, we can grasp the laws of the struggle between materialism and idealism and between dialectics and metaphysics, and this helps us, through analysing the struggles on the philosophical front, realize the true nature of class struggle and understand more clearly that disseminating dialectical and historical materialism and criticizing idealism and metaphysics is a long-term fighting task, and that we should always be on guard

against the class enemies' attacks on the philosophical front and repulse them.

In the history of philosophy, every reactionary school has its ideological origins. Contemporary idealism is the offspring of idealism in history. All opportunists and revisionists peddle idealism and metaphysics; stripped of their trade marks and fancy wrappings, no matter how "new" they seem, they are merely trash from the arsenal of reactionary philosophy in history.

Liu Shao-chi and other political swindlers divulged nothing new when they uttered such an idealist apriorism as that knowledge was inherent. They were only preaching what all reactionary classes had preached for thousands of years to dupe the working people.

In ancient China in the Spring and Autumn Period, Confucius (551-479 B.C.), a representative thinker of the slave-owner class, spoke of "sages" with "innate knowledge," asserting that some people were born "the very wisest," others "the very stupidest," and they will never change. After Confucius, many representative thinkers of the landlord class also spread idealist apriorism in various ways.

In Europe, Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher of the slave-owners and the nobility, talked about the "immortality of the spirit," declaring that man had gained all his knowledge in a "world of ideas" before he was born, and that learning was only the recollection of knowledge possessed in a previous existence.

Although the bourgeois German philosopher Kant admitted that experience was also a source of knowledge, he held that "we find existing in the mind a priori, the pure form of sensuous intuitions in general" before getting to know a thing. All these idealist philosophers throughout history, though they put it differently, without exception deemed knowledge to be a priori, denying that it originates from practice and is a reflection of the outside world.

There can be no differentiation without contrast. In the contemporary epoch, political swindlers like Liu Shao-chi also completely denied the role of practice in man's cognition, raving that certain men were born "geniuses." All this talk is simply a repetition of history's antiquated idealist apriorism. What is different is that they tried to sell it under a Marxist signboard, unscrupulously quoting out of context in order to overawe people. By studying some books on the

history of philosophy and learning about the struggles between the two lines in philosophy and what forms they took in different periods, we can link past struggles with present ones and learn to distinguish between the materialist theory of reflection and idealist apriorism and be better able to see through the lies and sophistry of all such sham Marxists.

Important Aspect of Struggle Between Two Lines

Our proletarian revolutionary teachers have always attached much importance to struggles in the philosophical field, making the criticism of bourgeois idealism and metaphysics an important aspect of the struggle between the two lines. In repudiating opportunist and revisionist philosophy, they not only pointed out its reactionary nature politically and theoretically, but also exposed its blood ties with idealism and metaphysics in history, thus unveiling its progenitors.

Styling himself a "reformer of socialism," Duhring in the 1870s boasted that his philosophy was the "final and ultimate truth." He wildly attacked Marxism and plotted "to form around himself a sect, the nucleus of a future separate party." In *Anti-Duhring*, Engels mercilessly unmasked Duhring, revealing how the latter ostensibly disparaged everything but had covertly stolen from Kant's metaphysics and pilfered from Hegel's idealism to concoct a philosophical hotchpotch of motley colours. Engels refuted Duhring as an out-and-out "charlatan" and shattered his treacherous attempt to split the German Social-Democratic Party.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Russian revisionists such as Bogdanov dressed Machism up as the most "recent scientific philosophy," and wanted to use it to "revise" Marxism, pushing an opportunist line of liquidating the revolution and the proletarian party. While resolutely fighting them politically, Lenin made a thorough criticism of Machism on the philosophical plane. In *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, he cited a host of historical facts which not only proved that Machism was incompatible with Marxism on every question in the theory of knowledge, but also exposed its forbears to be none other than the subjective idealism of Bishop Berkeley of the 17th century and the agnosticism of Hume, both of England, its comrade-in-arms to be the utterly reactionary immanentism, and its successor reactionary fideism, which upheld theism.

In rebuking Machism, Lenin borrowed the saying that he "who would know the enemy must go into the enemy's territory." Denouncing idealism simply as nonsense does not mean triumphing over it; it can be overcome only by understanding it and incisively criticizing it. We must learn the conscientious and scientific fighting spirit of our great revolutionary teachers in order to criticize bourgeois and revisionist philosophy thoroughly. It is imperative, therefore, to devote some time and effort to studying books on philosophical history.

In the last analysis, the struggle between the two lines in the Party is a struggle of whether the world is

to be transformed according to the proletarian world outlook or according to the bourgeois world outlook, a struggle between dialectical materialism and idealism and metaphysics. Throughout the past half century, Chairman Mao has always solved the question of the struggle between the two lines in the Party from the high plane of world outlook. At critical moments in this struggle, he has always enjoined the whole Party to pay due attention to studying philosophy and philosophical history and uprooting the theoretical foundations of the opportunist and revisionist lines, if the Party is to shatter these lines and eliminate their pernicious influence.

To combat the renegade Wang Ming's opportunist line, Chairman Mao wrote his famous philosophical treatises *On Practice* and *On Contradiction* in 1937. The former summed up the struggle between materialism and idealism on the question of the relation between knowing and doing in the history of philosophy. It systematically expounded the dialectical-materialist theory of the unity of knowing and doing, pointing out that dogmatism and empiricism — two forms of subjectivism — are only repeating the mistakes of rationalism and empiricism in history.

On Contradiction summed up the opposition between the two world outlooks — the dialectical and metaphysical world outlooks — in the history of human knowledge. It profoundly explained the basic law of materialist dialectics, pointing out that the dogmatist and empiricist methods of thinking are subjectivist, superficial and one-sided and repeat the metaphysical mistake in history.

Chairman Mao wrote his great work *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* in 1957. In it he employed dialectical and historical materialism to analyse the contradictions, classes and class struggle in socialist society. He trenchantly criticized the revisionist line by using the Marxist-Leninist line and revealed one characteristic of revisionism as opposing or distorting materialism or dialectics. Chairman Mao has time and again stressed the importance of learning and applying dialectical materialism to discern and criticize revisionism.

When opposing Peng Teh-huai's Right opportunist line in 1959, Chairman Mao laid particular emphasis on the fact that we must defeat this anti-Party, anti-Marxist trend of thought ideologically, i.e., theoretically. He called on us to study philosophy and subsequently philosophical history, in order to combat empiricism theoretically.

In the current educational movement in ideology and political line, Chairman Mao again raised the question of studying some books on philosophical history. It can thus be seen that, in the struggle between the two lines, an important historical experience assuring victory for the Marxist-Leninist line over the counter-revolutionary revisionist line is that we must study philosophy and philosophical history and repudiate op-

portunism and revisionism from the high plane of world outlook.

Improving Thinking Capacity

Engels pointed out that, to develop and improve our thinking capacity, we must study the philosophy of the past. Philosophy is the generalization and summing-up of the knowledge of nature and of society. In this sense, the history of philosophy is the history of human knowledge. In its history of knowledge, mankind has accumulated many valuable experiences, and also encountered many twists and turns. People sink into the quagmire of idealism not only because of class roots but also because of epistemological roots. Man's process of cognition does not ascend in a straight line, but moves in a curve, a spiral. If any fragment of this process is one-sidedly exaggerated and represented in absolute terms, the true features of objective things will be distorted and one will fall into idealism. As Lenin pointed out: **"Rectilinearity and one-sidedness, woodenness and petrification, subjectivism and subjective blindness — voila the epistemological roots of idealism."**

Departing from man's social nature and his historical development, pre-Marxist materialism lacked scientific dialectics, and treated idealism in a simplified

way, so that it not only failed to scientifically analyse idealism's class roots, but also failed to expose its epistemological roots. That is why pre-Marxist materialism never could thoroughly defeat idealism, and even allowed idealism to develop the dynamic role of consciousness, which it itself neglected. Only Marxist dialectical materialism can thoroughly defeat idealism, providing mankind with the sole scientific world outlook and methodology for knowing and changing the world.

We should take warning from the mistakes of those before us. Here a most important lesson for us is: Without studying dialectical and historical materialism and without conscientiously transforming one's cognitive ability, but acting solely on simple materialist and dialectical thinking, we will not be able to withstand the attacks of idealism and metaphysics and will easily be led on to the wrong path of idealism and metaphysics and thereby commit "Left" or Right mistakes in revolutionary struggle. By taking Marxism-Leninism as our guide and studying and learning from our predecessors' experiences and lessons on the question of knowledge and applying them to present struggles, we can avoid repeating these mistakes, acquire a good grasp of Marxism, understand more deeply and master dialectical materialism, and foster the scientific proletarian world outlook.