

By way of criticism, it may be remarked that the 'materialist conception of history' "is not too happy in its baptismal name."¹³ All events of social history, great and small, cannot be interpreted in terms of economics alone. The force of non-economic factors like religion, culture, philosophy, language, nationalism and the like cannot be thoroughly ignored. So the doctrine of Marx is too lopsided to explain all the facts of experience. The history of the world is full of events having their source in religious dogmatism, or racial instincts for warfare, or extension of their cultural influence and the like. Thus, to say that economics alone makes history is not a tenable proposition. Economics may be said to play a very important part, but it cannot be taken as decisive. "Marx was quite right in drawing attention to the importance of economic factor, which had been seriously neglected, but he gave it an undue prominence and thus oversimplified the complexity of the social situation as his followers have continued till this day."¹⁴

Class War: The doctrine of class war is a corollary to the doctrine of historical materialism. The two are inextricably connected and have their foundation in the doctrine of dialectical materialism whereby every change is regarded as a consequence of struggle between contending elements. If the thesis has its anti-thesis and the inevitable conflict between the two leads to the disintegration of both and their eventual replacement by a synthesis, the role of contending social classes should be looked into. While the dominant class is the thesis, the dominated class is its anti-thesis; and as a result of the inevitable conflict between the two, a new stage of social development takes place. Applying it to the present society, Wayper says that capitalism being the thesis calls into being its anti-thesis (organised labour) and from the resultant clash the final synthesis of the classless society will result when pre-history ends and history begins. It is true that St. Simon and Guizot had thrown some focus on the nature of class divergences, but the original feature with Marx is 'the union of the idea with Hegel's dialectic.'¹⁵

Marx and Engels affirm in the *Communist Manifesto*: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. Freeman and slave, Patrician and Plebian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, the oppressor and the oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes." It shows that there "is no history apart from the record of class struggles; and presumably what is

13. Alexander Gray: *The Socialist Tradition*, p. 301. Even Cole's suggestion of designating it as a 'realist conception of history' would be inadequate.
14. R.N. Carew Hunt: *The Theory and Practice of Communism*, pp. 78-79. We may also endorse the view of Laski: "The impulses of men are, in fact, never referable to any single source. The love of power, herd instinct, rivalry, the desire of display, all these are hardly less vital than the acquisitiveness which explains the strength of material environment."
Karl Marx: An Essay.
15. C.L. Wayper: *Political Thought*, p. 207.

left of history when the class struggle is decanted is but the record of insignificant trivialities."¹⁶

As social movements are class movements, the term 'class' occupies a particular connotation for Marx. By the term 'class' he means a collection of people who feel a sense of solidarity created by the consciousness of their very position in the economic order of the day. It signifies that the members of a class entertain sentiments, illusions, forms of thought and views of life not as individuals but as members of the class. The people having the ownership of the means of production, exchange and distribution constitute the dominant class of the exploiters and the oppressors, on the other hand, those who earn their living by selling their labour power constitute the class of the oppressed and the exploited people. So feudal lords and the serfs constituted two contending classes in the feudal society, the capitalists and the workers constitute two such classes in the present capitalist society. Marxism, however, is particularly concerned with the class of the workers (proletariat) that is to be freed from all sorts of oppression and exploitation and given the power with which it has been deprived so far.

If social history is studied from the viewpoint of class struggle, society, according to Marx and Engels, has passed through four stages so far. First, there was *primitive communism* in which society was free from any class antagonism. There was common possession over things. But the second stage of social development took place when *slave society* came into being in which freemen became the masters and they exploited the slaves. With the invention of agriculture, society changed. The freemen constituted the dominant class and the slaves belonged to the dominated class. So the class war started. Then came the *feudal society* as the third stage of social development. Now the landlords and the nobles constituted the dominant class, and the peasants or the serfs belonged to the exploited class. With the success of the industrial revolution came into being the fourth kind of society—the *capitalist society*—in which the bourgeoisie and the proletariat became the two contending classes. On this basis, Marx and Engels could predict that *socialist society* would replace the capitalist society in the next stage of development. And as the socialist society would effect an end of class contradictions, the process of class war would come to an end. The socialist society would eventually become the communist society having neither classes nor state.

The termination of the feudal society was a great event that opened the way for the emergence of capitalism. So it was a 'bourgeois democratic revolution'. But a socialist revolution would also occur as a result of the inevitable application of the law of dialectical materialism and then capitalist system would go. It would be the first revolution of its kind. As Marx and Engels affirm in the *Communist Manifesto*: "All previous historical movements were the movements of the minorities, or in the interest of the minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority."

16. Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

The doctrine of class war, being the core of Marxism, may be criticised on these grounds:

1. It teaches the lesson of class hatred and class enmity. All classes should live in peace and harmony, but Marx and Engels take a wrong view of man's social life and also seek to vitiate it by injecting the poison of irreconcilable class antagonisms. The element of divergence of interests may be traced, but to take them as patent symbols of class enmity is not justified. As Popper says: "The divergence of interests with the ruling and the ruled classes goes for that Marx's theory of classes must be considered as a dangerous over-simplification even if we admit that the issue between the rich and the poor is always of fundamental importance."¹⁷ The Marxian theory of class war "justified hatred and aggressiveness on the part of those who hold such views towards their political opponents.... It does suggest that those who concentrate blindly upon the existence of this phenomenon who deny historically the possibilities of cooperation and goodwill among persons and groups of conflicting economic interests, are conditioned to do so by the necessities of their emotional life, and by an over-powering desire to find a scapegoat upon which to lay down their aggression."¹⁸

2. The history of a people has a record of many changes which may be due to different reasons and the role of class war may not at all be traceable in them. Quite obviously, it "is absurd to seek to show that there must be an economic occasion to every conflict in history. Perhaps ultimately the moral factor is a more potent divider of men than is the economic; men consciously engage in conflict, in defiance of the dictates of their economic interests."¹⁹ This doctrine suggests that the true element lies in the certainty that group acquisitiveness and the canalisation of personal aggressiveness through group life and particularly through group acquisitiveness, is a frequent source of conflict and change in history. But conditions differ from people to people and from country to country. On the basis of a psychological investigation it is said that the balance of conflicting forces "is extremely likely to vary from group to group, and from nation to nation. Upon psychological grounds alone, it is in the highest degree unlikely that the tradition of emotional education should be identical for all nations and all classes."²⁰

3. It is also said that Marx has taken a wrong view of the term 'class'. In order to have the application of his dialectical formula, he has blinded himself to the existence of only two hostile social classes. He has not only ignored the facts of harmony and cooperation among the people, he has also deliberately discarded the existence of the 'middle class', a class that is neither very rich so as to be taken as an ally of the capitalist class, nor so poor to be included in the class of those to whom the law of increasing misery and degradation certainly applies. The neo-

17. Karl Popper: *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. II, Ch. 16.

18. E.F.M. Durbin: *Politics of Democratic Socialism*, p. 190.

19. Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 508.

20. Durbin, *op. cit.* n. 189.

Marxists like Herbert Marcuse of the United States and Jean-Paul Sartre of France have frankly taken into account this fact. The liberal economists also throw ample light on the role of joint stock enterprises in which the increasing role of the middle class is too obvious. A critic rightly feels that as propaganda the doctrine of class war "is excellent, if for no other reason than that it puts the worker on the side that it informs him is sure to win. As science, it is considerably less satisfactory, since there are grave difficulties about the term 'class' and thereafter about the reality of the class struggle."²¹

4. The prediction that Marxism makes on the basis of the doctrine of class war may also be wrong. It is not certain that after the successful overthrow of the hold of the bourgeoisie, the power may fall into the hands of the proletariat. "The breakdown of capitalism might result not in communism but in anarchy from which there might emerge some dictatorship unrelated in principle to communist ideals."²² It is also possible that a tottering capitalist system may create condition for the rise of fascism that would be a still more cruel state of affairs for the working class as happened in Italy in 1922. And so it is also possible that a successful socialist revolution may occur in a country without having a fully developed capitalist system as happened in Russia in 1917, or in China in 1949.

Labour Theory of Value: The doctrines of economic interpretation of history and class war form part of the Marxian sociological system, the labour theory of value constitutes the economic base of Marxism. But all the three are inter-related. It is here that we may trace the cause of exploitation and oppression of the working class at the hands of the capitalists. Marx takes from the early economists (like Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Ferdinand Lassalle) the idea of labour power that creates value in the commodities, but what he finally contributes is the antithesis of liberal economics. The economic analysis of Marx on the issue of 'value' has two parts—the labour theory of value and the theory of surplus value.

1. The labour theory of value regards labour as the sole creator of value in a commodity and holds that the value of a commodity is determined by the amount of labour power spent over the production of that commodity. Marx uses the term 'exchange value' to denote the worth of an article in terms of its relation to other articles. This exchange, commonly represented by the price, may fluctuate according to market conditions, but these fluctuations are accidental and do not eliminate or even obscure the real influence which determines both the value and ultimately the exchange value of a commodity. Thus the labour time which is socially necessary for the production of commodities asserts itself like an overriding law of nature in spite of superficial variations in exchange values, as the real standard or measure of exchange value. As Marx says: "A commodity has

21. Lancaster: *Masters of Political Theory*

22. Laski: *Communist Theory*

a value, because it is a crystallisation of social labour... The relative value of commodities is, therefore, determined by the respective quantities or amounts of labour, worked up, realised, fixed in them."²³

2. As a result of the inventions in science and technology, the instruments of production (like machinery, steam power, factories, electricity etc., enormously increased both in number and efficiency) are owned by a relatively small class of the capitalists. The capitalist buys the labour power of the destitute workman, applies it to the machinery and raw materials which he owns and as a result produces a commodity having exchange value. The commodity is sold at a price which is greater than the amount expended on the amount of the workmen's wages and the upkeep of the factory. This difference between the exchange value of the manufactured commodity and the price paid to the workmen who produced it, is called the surplus value. Marx contends that in each factory or enterprise the wages paid to the workers "are not equivalent of the full value they produce but only equal to about half of this value or even less. The rest of the value produced by the worker during his working days is taken out right by his employer."²⁴

The availability of surplus value to the capitalists enables them to exploit the workers and thereby accumulate more and more capital. Inflationary trends are encouraged so that the level of price goes up that results in the increasing misery and degradation of the working class. A situation comes when the working class reaches the last point of economic degradation and the way for a revolution is opened. In the language of the *Communist Manifesto*: "The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated."

The Marxian theory of value suffers from some weaknesses. First, it is wrong to say that labour alone is the creator of value in a commodity. The liberal economists take five agents of production and labour is one of them (others being land, capital, organisation and enterprise) and, as such, labour cannot have more than a share of the total dividend. Second, the prediction of Marx that the law of increasing misery and pauperisation would inevitably apply has not been proved by actual developments of many capitalist states. The poor have not become poorer; rather in some leading capitalist countries we may take note of the embourgeoisment of the working class. It is due to this that in such countries there exist no prospects of a socialist revolution. Last, Marx has taken a wrong view of the work that a capitalist performs for increasing the production of his goods. He may be a hard-working and an honest man doing for the good of the country. On the other hand, the workers for whom Marx has done so much of hard thinking, may be idlers and shirkers. To say that all good shall follow from the abolition of capitalism and the advent of socialism in its place, is to talk like a utopian social thinker. Thus, a liberal economist of England like Prof. J.M. Keynes

23. See Laidler, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

24. *What is Marxism?*, p. 21.

described the *Capital* of Marx as "an obsolete text book on economics..., not only scientifically erroneous, but without interest of application for the modern world."²⁵

Inevitability of Revolution: The law of dialectical materialism tells us that no social system can exist forever. The antithesis would work to destroy the thesis and a new thing in the form of a synthesis would emerge. Thus, Marx and Engels could declare in the *Communist Manifesto* that 'capitalists dig their own graves'. In their view, the inevitable trend of development in the existing economic system is in the direction of a constantly greater intensification of the inexorable warfare between the owners of industrial property and the propertyless workers. At the same time, the trend is towards the overthrow of capitalism. Capitalism constantly generates the needs of its own destruction. The instruments which the owners use to enlarge their profits and rents are the instruments which, when perfected, fall inevitably into the hands of the workers, to be used by them to demolish the whole capitalist system."²⁶

What does inevitably lead to all this? The following factors may be enumerated:

1. The tendency under capitalist production is towards large scale production and monopoly. As a result of this tendency manifested in the form of partnerships, joint stock companies and corporations, wealth becomes concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, so that smaller capitalists are more and more crowded out and pushed down into the proletarian class. Thus, along with the increase in great capitalist fortunes the number of capitalists decreases, while the working class gains in numbers.
2. The tendency is towards local concentration. Large-scale production necessitates the bringing together of thousands of workers into small areas, and by these contacts they become more fully conscious of their common hardships and needs their class consciousness is strengthened and their means of cooperation are facilitated.
3. The tendency of capitalist production is towards the attainment of ever wider fields for markets. This requires a high development of the means of communication among different parts of the industrial world and this, in turn, facilitates intercommunication among the workers distributed through the industrial world.
4. The capitalist system produces recurring economic crises. The labourers, who constitute the great body of consumers, are paid enough to purchase only a very limited portion of what they produce; the products accumulate and crises of extreme over-production take place. The recurring crises, becoming more acute as capitalism develops, make the domination of capitalists more insecure; all the means which the latter adopt to avoid the crises—such as acquiring new markets—only pave the way for severer and more extensive crises and destroy the means whereby they may be prevented.

5. The tendency under capitalism is towards a steady increase in the misery, ignorance and dependency of the workers; and this aggravates their hostility and discontent. Throughout the whole process, capitalism, while always increasing the number of the propertyless, is always by its development of labour-saving machinery, reducing the number of labourers that it needs; in other words, it constantly brings down the number of those who are able to purchase its constantly increasing products.

"Thus, the capitalist system enlarges the number of workers, brings them together into compact groups, makes them class conscious, supplies them with means of inter-communication and cooperation on a world-wide scale, reduces their purchasing power, and by increasingly exploiting them arouses them to organised resistance. Capitalists, acting persistently in pursuit of their own natural needs and in vindication of a system dependent upon the maintenance of profits, are all the time creating conditions which stimulate and strengthen the natural efforts of workers in preparing for a system that will fit the needs of a workingman's society."²⁷

The most distinctive aspect of Marxism should be seen in its being a theory of action. Unlike utopian socialists, Marx offers a programme of action so that the workers may win the 'battle for democracy'. In 1875, he strongly condemned the Gotha programme adopted by the German social democrats in the name of its being a pro-bourgeois exercise and also for keeping the working class in a condition of inaction. His main argument was that "every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programs."²⁸ But his programme is both revolutionary and evolutionary. It is given in the *Communist Manifesto* that the workers disdain to hide their views and aims; they openly declare that their aims can be achieved only by violent means. But elsewhere Marx also appreciates peaceful and democratic methods in advanced democratic countries like Britain, America and France. It shows that the view of Marx on the methods of revolution is not vague but 'pragmatic'. "He would advocate organised violence where conditions indicated that socialists could obtain political supremacy in that way.... He opposed, on the one hand, an untimely revolution, and, on the other hand, all attempts, even through legitimate means, to establish a socialist regime before the conditions were ripe."²⁹

But a question arises as to what would occur after the successful revolution. On two occasions Marx speaks of a transitional state as 'dictatorship of the proletariat.'³⁰ In the view of Marx, a state is not a voluntary association of community cooperation but a compulsive force—employed organisation and, indeed, an instrument of exploitation

27. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

28. Earlier in 1871 Marx said: "The workers have no ready-made utopias to introduce by order of the people. They know that in order to work out their emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which society is irresistibly tending by its own economic agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men." *Civil War in France*, p. 50.

29. Coker, *op. cit.*, n 50

30. *Marx and Critique of the Gotha Program of 1875.*

and oppression by one class over another. But the state during the period of transition would be a state of its own kind, it would be a 'dictatorship' by all means but not like that of a bourgeois state in the hands of a dictator. It would be a state in the hands of the working class committed to eliminate the class of the exploiters and the oppressors by all forcible means so that a classless condition of life eventually comes into being signifying prevalence of sovereignty of the people basically different from the 'vague idea of popular sovereignty' given in a bourgeois state.³¹ In the final stage of socialism (communism) there would be no classes, no state, and so the law of dialectic would cease to operate. The society will inscribe on its banners: 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs'. In short, the complete application of socialism will allay all class antagonisms. The dialectic of thesis and antithesis will be resolved in a final synthesis. Through socialism, mankind will make the ascent 'from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.'³²

Marx died in 1883 and Engels died in 1895, leaving behind a new kind of social theory as well as a programme of action laudably known as 'scientific socialism'. It had its revision or reinterpretation at the hands of great leaders like Lenin and Stalin in Russia and Mao of China who earned the distinction of applying it to their respective countries. Thus, in its applied form, Marxism became 'communism'. Marxism has, as we have seen, its strong and weak sides and so numerous are its friends and foes. But the peculiar thing about Marx is that he is regarded as the greatest of all social scientists by his admirers, the criticism of his foes indirectly places him in the same position. Laidler says: "The years that have intervened since his (Marx's) death have shed no lustre on his name, and have given him a secure place as one of the great economic social scientists, historians, and leaders of the working-class movement of all time. He made his mistakes in calculating the speed with which the great change was to be brought about, but he prophesied with remarkable insight the general direction of the change."³³ So says Laski: "Where Marx was also irresistibly right, was his prophecy that the civilisation of his epoch was built upon sand. And even the faults of his prophecy may be pardoned by an agitator in exile to whom the cause of the oppressed was dearer than his own welfare."³⁴

31. Marx: *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, p. 52.

32. Engels: *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, D. 135. *The Communist Manifesto* also says that the ultimate goal is the abolition of all classes.