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Class Struggle and Revolutionary Situation

Part I: Ripe for Revolution

Publisher's Note: Originally this article was part three of a reply in six parts in "Communist ORIENTATION" to the Swedish publication "THE SPARK"; which in a series of articles had attacked C.O. for its analyses of the general attitude and situation of the Danish and North West European working class of today. The article which is printed here in a slightly shortened version was published under the title "Two Lines (3)" on 12th November 1968.

THE SPARK, organ of the Swedish Communist League, Marxists-Leninists, in its concluding article against C.O., writes as follows:

But if the most prominent feature of the working class is still that it is an exploited and oppressed class, and if it has not been bribed by the capitalists, why then is it not socialist? C.O. and its parrots are wondering. While Karl Kautsky was still a Marxist he gave an answer which Lenin quoted with approval in "What is to be done?" (Collected Works, Moscow vol. 5, pp 383-84). Kautsky pointed out that consciousness of the necessity of socialism does not arise directly out of the class struggle of the proletariat and "can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge".

"The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia; it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduced it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allowed this to be done. Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without and not something that arose within it spontaneously." So it was, and so it is. And here we have the explanation both of why today the majority of the working class cannot be called socialist, and of why in the future they may become just that.

So much from THE SPARK.

The working class and the knowledge of their age

Because of the various modern theories that the intellectuals must have the leading role in revolution and in order that this quotation shall not lead people astray, it is necessary to remind our leaders of these words in a foot note from the hand of Lenin just after the quotation brought by him from Kautsky. Lenin writes:

"This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology (ideology of socialism, ed.). They take part, however, not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians ... in other words, they take part only when they are able, and to the extent that they are able, more or less, to acquire the knowledge of their age and develop that knowledge."

It is also necessary to stress the fact that workers of present day Denmark (and present day Sweden) have a hundred fold better opportunities of "acquiring the knowledge of their age" than had the workers of whom Lenin was speaking. A considerable part of the then Russian proletarians could neither read nor write, a considerable part of them lived under the most miserable conditions in the factory sheds, their working hours were much longer, none of them had access to the well-stocked public libraries of our day, not to mention money to buy the books required.

But, of course, it is still correct to say that one does not become a socialist or get knowledge of the laws governing the development of social structures just by being a worker in capitalist industry. You become a socialist by means of studies and readings after work through which you understand what it is to be a worker, why we have a capitalist society, why and how this society is going to be replaced by a socialist society, why and how the class society is going to give way to the classless communist society.

Desire for change – a necessary condition

However, that is not the most essential thing for us in the quotation carried in THE SPARK.

The essential thing in the immediate connection is to be found in Kautsky's remark – which Lenin endorses – that the intellectually most developed proletarians introduce socialist ideology into the struggle of the proletariat where conditions allow that to be done!

THE SPARK declares that it is the most important task of Marxists-Leninists in the capitalist world just now once again to arouse socialist consciousness in the working class.

This is un-marxist.

Marx, who was a materialist to the core, wrote these famous words in the preface to "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy":

"It is not the consciousness of human beings which decide their being, but on the contrary their social being which determines their consciousness."

Therefore even Lenin, who was also a materialist to his very marrow, formulated the task of the communists of the Western world in the following terms.:

"... to be able to seek, find and correctly determine the specific path or the particular turn of events that will lead the masses to the real, decisive and final revolutionary struggle..."

Does this mean that we deny the necessity of introducing a socialist consciousness into the proletariat? By no means. Does this mean that we are belittling the ideological struggle against reformism and revisionism? By no means.

Nor does it mean that we have forgotten Mao Tse-tung's words from "On Contradiction":

"While we recognize that in the general development of history the material determines the mental, and social being determines social consciousness, we also – and indeed must – recognize the reactions of mental on material things, of social consciousness on social being."

It means that while we – fully – recognize that ideology, Marxism, becomes a material force, when it is grasped by the masses – it can only be grasped by the masses when these masses are subjected to certain influences from their social conditions.

In other words: Kautsky was quite right, when he said that socialist ideology is introduced into the proletariat, where conditions allow this to be done.

The task that Lenin set the communists of the West expressly means that the communists must be able beforehand to say what events, what developments will create conditions for introducing socialist consciousness

into the masses – will convince them of the necessity of the revolution. Lenin himself gave a very good instance of this materialistic–Marxist – way of thinking, when in 1915 in the article "Bourgeois Philanthropists and Revolutionary Social-Democracy" he described three forms of sympathy for peace in the capitalist countries. The third form – the revolutionary form – he described like this:

3) The enlightened vanguard elements of the proletariat, the revolutionary social-democrats, attentively watch the sentiments of the masses, use their growing urge for peace not to support vulgar utopias of a "democratic" peace under capitalism, not to encourage hopes, being placed in the philanthropists, the authorities, the bourgeoisie, but in order to make the hazy revolutionary sentiments clear. They do so – basing themselves on the experience of the masses and on their sentiments, enlightening them by thousands of the facts of pre-war politics – in order systematically, steadfastly, unswervingly – to show the need for mass revolutionary action against the bourgeoisie and the governments of their respective countries as the only road towards democracy and socialism.

The war created a hazy indignation among the masses – and these were the necessary conditions for introducing socialist ideology among the masses! Without these experiences of the masses themselves – called forth by objective conditions – it is not possible to do so!

THE SPARK does not as much as ask itself the question of whether conditions in Sweden today allow the introduction of the ideology of socialism from without into the Swedish working class.

In the editorial board of THE SPARK and thus in the leadership of the CLML they commit the basic howler of taking for granted that these conditions are always present wherever you have a working class.

THE SPARK even has the audacity to mention China as the brilliant example of the fact that it is possible to realize socialism. Of course it is undeniably true that in China it was possible for the communist party under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung to arouse the socialist consciousness of the working class and of the working people. Of course THE SPARK is right in saying this. But THE SPARK completely forgets to ask the question of why this was possible. What were the conditions which allowed Mao Tse-tung and the party to instil socialist consciousness into the working class, from without?

The reason why Marxism-Leninism has played such a great role in China since its introduction is that China's social conditions call for it, that it has

been linked with the actual practice of the Chinese people's revolution and that the Chinese people have grasped it. Any ideology – even the very best, even Marxism-Leninism itself – is ineffective unless it is linked with objective realities, meets objectively existing needs and has been grasped by the masses of the people. We are historical materialists, opposed to historical idealism.

The underlinings in this quotation from Mao Tse-tung's article "The Bankruptcy of the Idealist Conception of History" (Selected Works, vol. 4, p. 457), are ours.

Elsewhere Mao writes ("Quotations", p. 36):

Apart from their other characteristics, the outstanding thing about China's 600 million people is that they are "poor and blank". This may seem a bad thing, but in reality it is a good thing. Poverty gives rise to the desire for change, the desire for action and the desire for revolution. On a blank sheet of paper free from any mark, the freshest and most beautiful characters can be written, the freshest and most beautiful pictures can be painted.

It was the Chinese social conditions – feudal oppression of the masses, the harassing and plunder of imperialism, the exploitation and oppression of bureaucrat-capitalism – which allowed Mao Tse-tung and the Communist Party of China from without to instil socialist ideology into the working class! "Poverty gives rise to the desire for change, the desire for action and the desire for revolution" – those were the conditions that allowed it to arouse the socialist consciousness.

We do not have conditions like that in Denmark or in Sweden today.

Imperialism and Opportunism

Today it is true that the working class of our countries is "exploited! – but it is not poor, it has no desire for change, it has no desire for revolution, it has no desire for socialism.

The working class of our countries is not blank. It is full to the edge of the paper of petty bourgeois and bourgeois ideas, of reformist and revisionist misconceptions of society and of itself. There is hardly room to write a single fresh or beautiful word and paint a single fresh or beautiful picture!

On several occasions Communist ORIENTATION has carried statements from Engels about the English working class, which became bourgeois. why? Because – no, let Engels himself explain it:

"As regards the workers it must be stated, to begin with, that no separate political working-class party has existed in England since the downfall of the Chartist Party in the fifties. This is understandable in a country in which the working class has shared more than anywhere else in the advantages of the immense expansion of its large scale industry. Nor could it have been otherwise in an England that ruled the world market; and certainly not in a country where the ruling classes have set themselves the task of carrying out, parallel with other concessions, one point of the Chartists' programme after another."

In "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism", Lenin quotes the social-liberal Hobson's graphic description of the perspectives in connection with the imperialist countries living off the colony of China, and Lenin adds that this perspective is highly realistic, "if the forces of imperialism had not been counteracted". Lenin goes on to write:

"Imperialism, which means the partitioning of the world, and the exploitation of other countries besides China, which means high monopoly profits for a handful of very rich countries, makes it economically possible to bribe the upper strata of the proletariat, and thereby fosters, gives shape to, and strengthens opportunism. We must not, however, lose sight of the forces, which counteract imperialism in general, and opportunism in particular, and which, naturally, the social-liberal Hobson is unable to perceive."

Which are those forces mentioned by Lenin? They are the revolutionary parties, they are the revolutionary, Marxist ideology, grasped by the masses. But, THE SPARK itself writes that we do not have such parties, and the parties which we know – the social-democrats and the communist parties never succeeded in accomplishing the task of disseminating Marxist ideology. The forces which Lenin relied on have not been active in our countries!

The following passage is characteristic of Lenin's approach to the concrete reality which he knew – and at the same time a typical instance of how this reality has changed since Lenin's days. Lenin further writes in the work mentioned:

"The distinctive feature of the present situation is the prevalence of such economic and political conditions that are bound to increase the irreconcilability between opportunism and the general and vital interests of the working class movement: imperialism has grown from an embryo into the predominant system; capitalist monopolies occupy first place in economics and politics; the division of the world has been completed; on the other hand, instead of the undivided monopoly of Great Britain, we see a few

imperialist powers contending for the right to share in this monopoly, and this monopoly is characteristic of the whole period of the early twentieth century. Opportunism cannot now be completely triumphant in the working class movement of one country for decades as it was in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century; but in a number of countries it has grown ripe, overripe, and rotten, and has become completely merged with bourgeois policy in the form of social-chauvinism."

As pointed out on earlier occasions, Engels foresaw that when the English monopoly of large scale industry and colonies was broken, the English working class would come down on a level with the material standard of living of the continental workers once again, and that therefore opportunism in the English working class movement would lose its predominant position.

Lenin studied reality at his time and noted the fact that the further development of capitalism to the stage of imperialism since Engels' days had brought about the situation that by now more countries partook of the monopoly, and that therefore opportunism had spread to these other rich countries.

Lenin predicted that the decaying and dying capitalism would mean that opportunism which was already in his day decaying and dying, would soon lose its grip on the working masses of these countries.

Any mere approach to an honest study of the reality of our day shows that opportunism – the social-democrats and the revisionists – has retained its grip on the overwhelming majority of the working class to this very day.

THE SPARK itself admits this fact. But how will THE SPARK explain it? If you seek the explanation in the same unswervingly materialist fashion that was used by Lenin, the result will invariably be that reached by us: The intensified exploitation by neo-colonialism of the former colonial countries.

Lenin quoted Engels' statement to the effect that the English working class gaily shared the feast of the colonial plunder of English capital, and he went on to write:

"This clearly shows the causes and effects. The causes are: 1. Exploitation of the whole world by this country (England). 2. Its monopolist position in the world market. 3. Its colonial monopoly. The effects are: 1. A section of the British proletariat becomes bourgeois. 2. A section of the proletariat allows itself to be bought by, or at least paid by, the bourgeoisie."

Lenin stresses that the very same situation is responsible for the growth of opportunism in all the imperialist countries. He writes:

"The imperialism at the beginning of the twentieth century completed the division of the world among a handful of states, each of which today exploits (in the sense of drawing superprofits from) a part of the whole world only a little smaller than that which England exploited in 1858."

Any mere approach to an honest study of our reality today shows that this exploitation of the then colonial, now formally politically independent countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America has been further intensified since the time of Lenin.

Thus we have the following situation:

Causes: 1. Imperialism is continuing to exploit, nay is exploiting more than ever the former and present colonial countries. 2. Among them they share the monopoly of industrial goods on the capitalist world market.

Effects: 1. A still bigger section of the proletariat becomes bourgeois. 2. A still bigger section of the proletariat allows itself to be led by men who are bought by, or at least paid by, the bourgeoisie.

"Optimism" and Utopia

Let us take one more statement from the hand of Lenin:

"And so there is created that bond between imperialism and opportunism, which revealed itself first and most clearly in Great Britain, owing to the fact that certain features of imperialist development were observable there much earlier than in other countries. Some writers, L. Martov, for example, are prone to wave aside the connection between imperialism and opportunism in the working class movement – a particularly glaring fact at the present time – by resorting to 'official optimism' ... like the following: the cause of the opponents of capitalism would be hopeless if it were progressive capitalism that led to the increase of opportunism, or, if it were the best-paid workers who were inclined towards opportunism, etc. We must have no illusions about 'optimism' of this kind. It is optimism in respect of opportunism; it is optimism which serves to conceal opportunism."

THE SPARK consistently refuses to see the connection between imperialism – the plunder of the colonies – and opportunism. They are still so "optimistic" as to deny the fact that "the best-paid workers are inclined towards opportunism". You must still have no illusions about "optimism" of this kind

– it still serves to conceal opportunism! As Lenin put it: “The most dangerous of all in this respect are those who do not wish to understand that the fight against imperialism is a sham and humbug unless it is inseparably bound up with the fight against opportunism.”

By refusing to open up their eyes to the fact that the reason why the Swedish working class (just as the Danish one) is bourgeois to a great extent and that to an even greater extent it allows itself to be led by people who are “bought or at any rate paid by the bourgeoisie” – that the reason for this must be sought for and can only be found in “certain imperialist features of development”, which are now also observable in Sweden, THE SPARK is setting the un-Marxist task of speaking or writing the workers into understanding the necessity of socialism without considering the objective conditions. THE SPARK forgets that the working class must have practical, daily experience concerning the bestiality of capitalism, that we must have a crisis, that we must have wrath, indignation and hatred because of such a crisis, before it will become possible to convince the class of the necessity of revolution.

The task that THE SPARK sets itself is pure utopia!

Matured for revolution

For a good many decades now, the fully developed capitalist world has been ripe for a socialist revolution, that is true. As Lenin said there is no “healthy” capitalism in the age of imperialism. “Healthy” capitalism twice this century led to world wars with mass slaughtering of people and mass destruction of material things. Social production has long been developed to such a degree that in this respect socialism is possible and reasonable.

And yet we have had no socialist revolution in these countries, and it must be the task of communists, who know that the general laws for social development will inevitably lead to capitalism being replaced by socialism, to study and to find out, why we have not had this revolution. It is a task for Marxists for the simple reason that they have to know in order to be able to say why we then will have it at a later time. The answer to this question is an essential part of the description of the capitalist world, and without such a description revolutionaries cannot carry out their political work. You have to know the world you want to change!

One of the reasons why we have not had the socialist revolution is to be found in the fact that the economic development in our part of the world has created a working class which is unable to overthrow the capitalist class by its own strength. The lever of the socialist revolution in the fully developed

capitalist countries in West Europe must not yet be applied in these countries themselves – it must be applied in the former and present colonial, semi-colonial and dependent countries!

This is not a new situation! We have previously seen a situation in which a capitalist country has created the necessary social conditions for socialism, but nevertheless does not have a working class which is able to carry through the revolution. It was to be found in England almost 100 years ago. Karl Marx described it!

With an almost uncanny actuality for us today, Marx writes in various letters from the years 1869-70 about the relation between the possibility of a socialist revolution in England and the English oppression of Ireland. Furthermore there is a good deal of working method to be learnt from the study of the development of his ideas.

We start with an excerpt from a letter from Marx to Kugelmann of 29th November, 1869 (taken from "Marx/Engels: Selected Correspondence", Moscow 1965):

"I have become more and more convinced – and the only question is to drive this conviction home to the English working class – that it can never do anything decisive here in England until it separates its policy with regard to Ireland most definitely from the policy of the ruling classes, until it not only makes common cause with the Irish but actually takes the initiative in dissolving the Union established in 1801 and replacing it by free federal relationship. And this must be done, not as a matter of sympathy with Ireland but as a demand made in the interests of the English proletariat. If not, the English people will remain tied to the leading-strings of the ruling classes, because it will have to join with them in a common front against Ireland. Every one of its movements in England itself is crippled by strife with the Irish, who form a very important section of the working class in England. The prime condition of emancipation here – the overthrow of the English landed oligarchy – remains impossible because its position here cannot be stormed so long as it maintains its strongly entrenched outposts in Ireland."

In this and in later letters, Marx stresses the fact that when first power in Ireland will have passed into the hands of the Irish themselves, it will be so much easier for them to overthrow the English landlords, because the struggle against them is not only an economic, but also a national question, since the "landlords there are not, like those in England, the traditional dignitaries and representatives of the nation, but its mortally hated oppressors". In the letter mentioned, Marx goes on to write:

"But since the English working class undoubtedly throws the decisive weight into the scale of emancipation generally, the lever has to be applied here."

Thus Marx says here that through its socialist revolution the English working class in the capitalistically far more highly developed England must help the oppressed population in colonial Ireland to its liberation. But very soon Marx changes his idea. Only some 10 days later (10th December) he writes to Engels:

"...The way I shall put forward the matter next Tuesday is this: that quite apart from all the phrases about "international" and "humane" justice for Ireland – which are taken for granted in the International Council – it is in the direct and absolute interest of the English working class to get rid of its connection with Ireland. And this is my fullest conviction, and for reasons which in part I can not tell the English workers themselves. For a long time I believed that it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working class ascendancy. I always expressed this point of view in the New York Tribune. Deeper study has convinced me of the opposite. The English working class will never accomplish anything until it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland. That is why the Irish question is so important for the social movement in general." (Italics here and in the following are Marx's own).

Marx further expounds his new point of view in a letter to S. Meyer and A. Vogt on 9th April, 1870, in which apparently he gives some of those reasons which in part he could not tell the English workers themselves. Marx writes:

"After occupying myself with the Irish question for many years I have come to the conclusion that the decisive blow against the English ruling classes (and it will be decisive for the workers' movement all over the world) cannot be delivered in England but only in Ireland.

On 1st January, 1870, the General Council issued a confidential circular drawn up by me in French... on the relation of the Irish national struggle to the emancipation of the working class, and therefore on the attitude which the International Association should take in regard to the Irish question.

I shall give you here only briefly the decisive points.

Ireland is the bulwark of the English landed aristocracy. The exploitation of that country is not only one of the main sources of this aristocracy's material welfare; it is also its greatest moral strength. It, in fact, represents the domination of England over Ireland. Ireland is therefore the great means by which the English aristocracy maintains its domination in England itself."

In the letter Marx stresses that freedom for Ireland would immediately result in a land reform, the necessary consequence of which would be the overthrow of the English landlord class, which again would mean the fulfillment of the prime condition for the proletarian revolution in England.

He further stresses that the English bourgeoisie has the same interest as the aristocracy in maintaining Ireland under the British rule: Ireland means cheap meat and wool to the English markets, an annual revenue of between six and ten million pounds coming from Ireland to England each year, etc.

Marx goes on to write:

"But the English bourgeoisie has, besides, much more important interests in Ireland's present-day economy.

Owing to the constantly increasing concentration of tenant-farming, Ireland steadily supplies its own surplus to the English labour market, and this forces down wages and lowers the moral and material condition of the English working class.

And most important of all! Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he feels himself a member of the ruling nation and so turns himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists of his country against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He cherishes religious and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the "poor whites" to the "niggers" in the former slave states of the USA. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker at once the accomplice and the stupid tool of the English rule in Ireland.

This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And that class is fully aware of it."

Marx further writes:

"England, being the metropolis of capital, the power which has hitherto ruled the world market, is for the present the most important country for the

workers' revolution, and moreover the only country in which the material conditions for this revolution have developed up to a certain degree of maturity. Therefore to hasten the social revolution in England is the most important object of the International Workingmen's Association. The sole means of hastening it is to make Ireland independent.

Hence it is the task of the International everywhere to put the conflict between England and Ireland in the foreground, and everywhere to side openly with Ireland. And it is the special task of the Central Council in London to awaken a consciousness in the English workers that for them the national emancipation of Ireland is no question of abstract justice or humanitarian sentiment but the first condition of their own social emancipation."

When in 1914, in the article "The Utopian Karl Marx and the Practical Rosa Luxemburg", Lenin reported Marx' statements concerning the Irish question and the English socialist revolution, he also quoted a letter to Marx from Engels, in which Engels stresses what a misfortune it is for a nation to have subjugated another nation. Lenin noted the fact that events had not developed as Marx hoped for. "Both the Irish people and the British proletariat proved too weak" - and he wrote:

"The policy of Marx and Engels in the Irish question serves as a splendid example, which is of immense practical importance to this day, of the attitude which the proletariat of the oppressing nations should adopt towards national movements."

Lenin is still right!