

## Notes of the Month

# MARXISM AFTER EIGHTY YEARS

**The First World War and the October Revolution ushered in the general crisis of capitalism. The second stage of this crisis developed at the time of the Second World War and the socialist revolutions that took place in a number of European and Asian countries. World capitalism has now entered a new, third stage of that crisis, the principal feature of which is that its development was not connected with a world war.**

*Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1961.*

**E**IGHTY years ago Marx died. This eightieth anniversary is taking place in a world situation which is powerfully confirming all his teaching. New horizons are opening. On the one hand, the socialist world, guided by Marxism, is drawing close to the moment when it will represent the majority of world production, as it has already demonstrated its superiority in the rate of economic advance, science, technique, education and social provision. On the other hand, the deepening bankruptcy of the capitalist world is further shown in the present economic difficulties of all capitalist countries, the collapse of the post-war 'economic miracles' and 'managed capitalism', under-use of capacity and extension of mass unemployment, sharpening of trade conflicts and inter-imperialist antagonisms, and cracking of the Atlantic Holy Alliance.

### Hours of Decision

Certainly the road is not yet smooth. The arms race still drains resources alike in the capitalist and socialist worlds. The menace of war is still grave. But it is significant that, whereas the previous advances of socialism have been achieved in the conditions of social explosion through the contradictions of capitalism bursting into war, the present advance is being achieved in and through the fight for peace, the united blocking of the capitalist drive to war by the new world majority, representing socialism and national liberation. This is a new world situation, not merely confirming the teaching of Marxism, but requiring to be carried forward along fresh paths in the light of that teaching. The coming years are the most critical. All the contradictions of the present economic and political situation are most sharply featured in Britain, the original cradle of capitalism

and now the scene of its most manifest decay. The failure of the Macmillan Conservative Government after a decade of fiascoes is recognised by all. But is Labour ready with any adequate alternative programme? Such is the crucial question facing us at the present moment in this particular corner of an ever more rapidly changing world.

### **Forty Years Back and Forty Years On**

The first occasion for one of these periodic reviews of the advance of Marxism in the world in these Notes was forty years ago when we wrote under the title 'Marxism After Forty Years'. That was in 1923. The period between the death of Marx and the foundation of this journal forty-two years ago was less than the period between the present number and that foundation issue. The living personal memory of Marx and Engels was still strong among many then active. Lenin was still alive to give direct leadership to the world (and incidentally the inspiration to the foundation of this journal). The young Russian Socialist Revolution had beaten off the wars of intervention, and advanced in that year to the new Constitution, replacing the old 'Russian Federation of Soviet Socialist Republics' by the new 'Union of Soviet Socialist Republics', thereby delivering a death blow to the last remnants of the old Russian chauvinist traditions by obliterating the very name 'Russia' from the official title and revealing instead the new principle of the union of free and equal nations (a warning to Western editors who still insist on calling the U.S.S.R. 'Russia'). In the capitalist world Poincaré was invading the Ruhr; Curzon dispatched his ultimatum to Moscow; Fascism (still a new term) had seized Italy; Hitler attempted his first coup in Munich. Grim shadows of the future.

### **Vision of 1983**

In those early Notes 'Marxism After Forty Years' we wrote:

World history today is Marxism alive. There was no need to refute his critics. History refutes them. Even while they pen their last lines to their Critical Examination they find themselves having to pack up their bags before the gathering storm of the Collapse and the Revolution. A hundred times 'disproved' and 'discredited' by critics whose names are now only known to Marxian students, for half a century declared 'obsolete' and 'antiquated' by theorists whose writings already carry about them the flavour of pre-war antiquity, a thousand times denied and watered down by faint-hearted followers afraid to break

with bourgeois learning and prejudice, today Marx stands master in the modern world—the Key to its interpretation and the power that moves it.

With the confidence of those years we threw out the challenge:

A hundred years from Marx's birth saw the first Proletarian Revolution and Proletarian State. Will a hundred years from his death see the World Proletarian Republic?

Twenty years still to run. 1983. Much may still happen. Marxism predicts world trends, not dates. But, judging by the advance of these forty years, the prospect of the victory of communism on a world scale by 1983 is not inconceivable. Certainly the race advances with accelerating speed. The goal draws closer.

### **Marxism After Fifty Years**

1933. The offensive of world reaction against Communism and human progress has entered a new and desperate stage. Hitler has been placed in power from above by the German ruling class, backed by Anglo-French-American finance and diplomacy to crush the German working class, to rearm Germany and prepare the second world war. This grim outcome of the renunciation of Marxism by the Western labour movement, of the lying promises of Social Democracy to offer an alternative painless path, leading in fact to world economic crisis and fascism and the drive to a new world war, prompted us to draw the lesson in writing of 'Marxism After Fifty Years':

Where today have all the movements that have abandoned Marxism, that have abandoned the Communism of Marx and Engels, the majority movements of post-war Social Democracy and Labourism, where have they brought the working class? In every country where they have dominated, they have brought the working class to a pitch of weakness and defeat, of misery and worsening of conditions, of staggering under the blows of a daily more aggressive world reaction, without parallel for half a century. In Italy, to the victory of Fascism. In Germany, where fifteen years ago the workers held all in their hands, the Counter-Revolution has been put back in the saddle by the help of Social Democracy, and the workers' movement is left at the mercy of the murder-bands of Hitler. In Britain, where millions and millions of workers listened hopefully to the call of Labourism, put Labour Governments in office, came out on the General Strike, today the capitalist offensive throws all the burdens of the crisis upon the workers, reaction reigns in the form of the National Government, and all the leaders of the Labour Party cynically throw off the professions of

allegiance to the movement they no longer need, and join the National Government, leaving demoralisation behind.

Indulgence must be asked for thus quoting old words of thirty years ago. But when today the same shamed and discredited Social Democracy has the effrontery to present itself anew, under the latest alias of 'Democratic Socialism'—concealing the same poisonous anti-Marxist contents and formulas under the new label because they know that the old label now stinks in the nostrils of all—then it is necessary to remind the younger generation of the record. Drawing together the lesson of 1933:

The examples of the Russian Revolution and of the German Revolution over these fifteen years teach the workers of the world on a giant scale how a workers' revolution can conquer and how a workers' revolution can be laid in the dust.

### **Battle to Save Mankind**

Hitler. Fascism. Nazi Rearmament. Munich. The supreme offensive of world counter-revolution to destroy Marxism and Communism for ever. From the moment Hitler was placed in power in 1933 the British Premier Macdonald flew to Geneva to propose the doubling of the German Army and to Rome to propose a Western Four-Power Pact of Britain, France, Hitler and Mussolini. Fore-shadowings of the future. The supreme ordeal of our time had opened. The supreme battle to save the future of humanity. Of this testing time and battle now opening we wrote in March, 1933:

The whole world today is Marxism in action. Every other theory and world outlook lies in ruins, shattered and impotent before the march of events. Marxism alone rides the storm, and casts its searchlight in front on the path forward of humanity. . . . Marxism is the weapon of this concrete fight in progress, of a fight both theoretical and practical, of what is in the last resort a physical fight of millions of men against the existing régime of violence and exploitation. . . . It was never more necessary than today when the fight is close and urgent, when all the forces of barbarism, of world war more destructive than ever before, of imperialist savagery and anarchy, of Hitlerism and all 'the wild asses of the devil' are threatening their supreme attempt to engulf the world and destroy all human culture, and when the sole force of world order and civilisation is the Communist International and the Soviet Union.

In this ordeal the international communist movement and the Soviet Union proved worthy of their trust and saved mankind from fascist slavery and destruction.

## **Marxism After Sixty Years**

1943. The year of Stalingrad. The height of the ordeal—and the first gleam of the dawn of victory. The international counter-revolution did not conquer. The Nazi armies, before which every other army in Europe had broken in rout, met the armies of socialism and met their master. The Munichite front had been broken by the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact. The phoney war, which combined passivity against Hitler with plans of military adventures against the Soviet Union, had been succeeded by the alternative tactics of the peculiar alliance, when the withholding of the second front for three years enabled the entire weight of the Hitlerite forces to be hurled against the Soviet Union, with the confident calculation and prediction of all the Western general staffs and politicians that the Soviet Union would be destroyed. Their calculations were frustrated. By 1943 panic seized the Western rulers at the prospect of the fall of fascism and the victory of communism. The planning of the post-war Western front against the Soviet Union and communism; the preparation of the Anglo-American atom bomb under the Quebec Agreement as the weapon, not against fascism, but for future domination against the Soviet Union; the Churchill secret memorandum against 'Russian barbarism' in post-war Europe; the organisation of the second front, after the Nazi armies were already beaten, to prevent the victory of the peoples in Europe: all date from this turning point. But everywhere the peoples rose in the enthusiasm of alliance with the Soviet people for liberation. The citadels of fascism fell. The old capitalist order was in fact only restored in Europe as far as the writ of the Anglo-American armies ran. Elsewhere the people's anti-fascist liberation movement took over, and entered on the building of socialism. The surge of national liberation swept through Asia and Africa. A new world was arising. The costs had been heavy, not least in the Soviet Union. But in this hour of trial and ordeal Marxism had received its highest vindication.

## **Marxism After Seventy Years**

1953. The new world has arisen. Socialism is now a world system. The glorious victory of the Chinese Revolution has, as Lenin predicted in the last words he wrote, made the world victory of socialism assured. From one-twelfth of the population of the world before the war socialism now reaches to over one-third, and

together with the new independent states of national liberation embraces three-quarters of mankind. The old counter-revolutionary front of the wars of intervention and of the Hitlerite Axis has now been renewed on a yet more extensive scale as the cold war front of American imperialism, extending its network of military alliances, subsidies and bases into every continent. In vain. 1953 was the year of inauguration of Dulles as Secretary of State, and in his inaugural television broadcast he complained that the capitalist world was suffering 'encirclement' by communism. In our review of 'Marxism After Seventy Years' we summarised the world picture as seen by Dulles:

Dulles surveyed the 'gloomy world situation' for the benefit of his viewers, and what did he see? In Asia? Communism. In the Middle East? Communism. In Africa? Communism. In South America? Communism. And in Western Europe the American 'investment', as he described it, of thirty billion dollars to ensure obedient vassals was in danger of being rendered null and void by the resistance of the peoples. And on top of this came the supreme complaint, expressed in his inaugural statement to the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee on January 15: 'The Russians have achieved all these results without using a single Russian soldier.'

Strange and revealing complaint. The American war lords have covered land and sea in every continent and region of the world within their reach with their bombers and their bases, their troops and military missions. They have spread destruction and devastation thousands of miles from their shores. And to their amazement they discover that everywhere the peoples turn against them. They discover that Communism is spreading everywhere 'without a single Russian soldier'. Incomprehensible situation to the mentality of a Dulles. For to him the words of Lenin are beyond his understanding: '*The teachings of Marxism are all-powerful because they are true.*'

Dulles has passed from the scene. His clarion calls for 'Massive Retaliation' to 'Roll Back the Tide of Communism' no longer win an echo. The new lords of Washington have not yet abandoned his dreams. But their troubles are mounting.

### **And Now?**

1963. Ten more years of accelerating world changes have sped forward. We are moving into a new world situation of limitless new possibilities to strain the imagination of the most daring. The shift in the world balance is today universally recognised, and has even begun to find partial reflection in the United Nations. The old

conservative centres of imperialism, still the most wealthy, still bristling with arms and threats, have begun to be seen by all as the declining minority sector of the world. During these years each successive major aggressive adventure of imperialism and counter-revolution has met with defeat. Korea. Vietnam. Suez. Hungary. Algeria. Most critical of all for the demonstration of the new still precarious world balance the experience of Cuba, and the checking of the planned aggression of the American giant last year against the heroic Cuban nation, thanks to Soviet aid. Few and rarer have been the temporary successes of counter-revolution, as in the American armed overthrow of the popular régime in Guatemala, or the present shameful reactionary coup and terror régime in Iraq. But the tide of history cannot be reversed. The post-war dreams of nuclear domination of the world by Western imperialism are ended for ever. Therewith the foundations of the cold war have begun to crack. New alignments and shifts begin to appear in inter-imperialist relations. But the practical conclusions have not yet been drawn. The framework of the old still seeks to strangle the emergence of the new. Hence the peculiar new unstable international situation into which we have entered, pregnant with menace and opportunities, and calling aloud for the action of the peoples to take advantage of the possibilities now opening before us.

### **Towards the End of the Road**

It is a new world situation without previous parallel. The philosophy of imperialism has always been the philosophy of the Big Stick, as the old President Theodore Roosevelt termed it; of domination; of superior power to dictate to the lesser breeds; or war to the death between rival imperialist powers for the redivision of the world. The gospel of the atom bomb as the post-war Saviour of Western civilisation; of Fulton; of the Truman Doctrine; of Dulles, breathed this philosophy. Now the conditions are changed. The dialogue has to be between equals. Dimly the new rulers of America begin to envisage this, then shrink back from the conclusions. The arms race is raised to yet more crazy heights. The current United States peace-time arms budget exceeds the war-time peak of 1945. Economically crippled and staggering Britain has to shoulder a crushing arms increase to close on two thousand million pounds. More and more voices ask: To what end? Since there can no longer be victory of the old social order by superior power, the choice becomes voluntary suicide ('Better dead than red'). It is a measure of the bankruptcy of the old order that such a slogan can be coined.

## **End Game and Mate**

Logic points to the alternative: Peaceful Co-existence. The parallel peaceful existence of differing social systems, providing the most favourable conditions for the great social transition of our epoch. Freedom of every people to choose their own future. No more foreign military occupations and bases and sectional military blocs. An end to nuclear weapons. Disarmament. These themes become, no longer merely pious aspirations, but the bargaining issues of international political negotiations. But the negotiations have so far invariably become stalled. For the alternative also fills the Western rulers with horror. Peaceful Co-existence? But that would mean the peaceful victory of Communism throughout the world. Never. Raise higher the barricade of weapons of power; invent new weapons; new, more deadly, poisonous, multi-killing weapons; extend the arms race throughout space, through outer space. So the fateful round is renewed. The vicious circle revolves without conclusion. Either way the rulers of the old order see the end of the road in sight. Mate in two moves. The vicious circle can only be broken by the action of the peoples. And in this action also Britain, Britain under its present rulers despised and kicked about by all, can play a key part, once its people awaken to their present opportunity.

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R.P.D.