

Part III

THE GREAT DIVIDE IN MARXISM

The holocaust of World War I, coming after a century of near peace and general optimism, shook the world down to its foundations, bringing with it the fall of world socialist organization known as the Second International. The German Social Democracy, the greatest party of the International, had voted war credits to the Kaiser. Lenin thought the Yezuaris, which announced this fact, to be a forgery of the German Imperial Office. When it was proven to be true, the theoretical ground on which he had stood, and which he had thought so impregnable, gave way under him.

Prior to August 1914, all Marxists had agreed that material conditions create the basis for the creation of a new society and that the more advanced the material conditions, the better prepared the proletariat would be for taking power. Now these same mass labor parties -- Germany was only the first but the Marxists of the other European warring countries followed suit -- in the most advanced countries where technology was most fully developed and the proletariat most highly organized, took an action which hurled masses of workers against each other across national boundaries to slaughter each other "in defense of the Fatherland." The German Social Democracy was not an organization of bourgeois liberals or even deviating reformists. It was, in the main, an organization of avowed revolutionary Marxists. It was a powerful organization of no less than a million members and another two and a half million trade unionists were under its influence. Before the outbreak of war they had taken a stand against any imperialist war that might break out. Today they were part of that mobilization for destruction. Why? They betrayed, yes, but betrayal wasn't merely "selling out." What were the objective causes for such total ideological

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collapse. The fact was overwhelming, totally unforeseen, incontrovertible. Confronted with the appearance of counter-revolution within the revolutionary movement, Lenin was driven to search for a philosophy that would reconstitute his own reason.

He began reading Hegel's Science of Logic. It turned out to be as great a divide in Marxist thought as, from the opposite end, the Second International's betrayal was in deed.

I. A Mind in Action

Krupskaya, in her Memoirs, tells us that Lenin began the study of Hegel for his writing the "Essay on Marxism" for the Encyclopedia Granat, that he thereupon puts the philosophical question in the forefront as is evident from the first section of the Essay. She adds: "This was not the usual way of presenting Marx's teaching."

This is true. The Essay is the first demonstration of the primacy of a philosophic approach in the whole history of writing "popularisations" of Marxian economic since the death of the founders of modern socialism. There is no doubt that as soon as Lenin has opened the Science of Logic, he has grasped the importance of dialectics, the movement of thought:

"Movement and self-movement (this NB! independent, spontaneous internally necessary movement), 'change,' 'movement and life,' 'the principle of every self-movement,' 'impulse' to 'movement' and to 'activity' -- opposite of 'dead-being' -- who would believe that this is the core of 'Hegelianism,' of abstract and abstruse (difficult, absurd?) Hegelianism? We must disclose this core, grasp it, save, shell it out, purify it -- which is precisely what Marx and Engels have done."

But a study of Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks will show that at the beginning of his study of Hegel, he still felt compelled to emphasize that he is reading Hegel materialistically, instead of taking that for granted and going on to what was new. In the Essay itself,

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he still separates materialism from dialectics. On the other hand, when he reaches the end of the Notabooks on Hegel's Logic, he writes:

"If Marx did not leave a 'Logic' (with a capital letter) he left the Logic of Capital, and this should be doubly utilized on the given question. In Capital there is applied to one science, the logic, dialectic and theory of knowledge of materialism (3 words are not necessary: they are one and the same). Taking all of value in Hegel and moving this forward."

It is Lenin himself who, with his characteristic precision, tells us just when he first fully grasped the dialectic. He wrote the Essay on Marx in July-November, but it was first in January that he writes to the Encyclopaedia Granat, stating that he has first now made some special study of the dialectic and would like to make some revisions in his essay:

Addressed to the Secretary of the Granat Publishing House in Moscow, January 4, 1915:

"Dear Colleague:

"Yesterday I received your letter and sent you a telegram, 'I consent'...."

"By the way, will there not still be time for certain corrections in the section on dialectics? Perhaps you will be good enough to write and say when exactly it is to go to the printers and what the last date is for receiving corrections. I have been studying this question of dialectics for the last six months and I think I could add something to it if there was time...."

Six weeks. It is the time, it took him to reach the book on "Subje. Wey" in the "Doctrine of the Notion." The Notabooks carry the date, December 17, 1914. It is under the section on "Syllogisms" that Lenin bursts forth with the spherisms that reveal how decisive was the break with his own philosophic past.

Heretofore, to Lenin, as to everybody else in the Second International, the Hegelian dialectic had been important mainly as a reference point in internal polemics. If an opponent was obscure, he was accused of dialectical sophistry and reminded that Marx had turned Hegel around and stood him right side up. Reformism and evolutionary

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theorists of socialist development were combatted by citing Hegel's "dialectics." It was generally agreed that Hegel stood for development and revolution, rather than standing still and evolution. The conception of contradiction was that of two units existing alongside of one another. The conception of opposition had not gone beyond Kant's dualism, as if Hegel had never destroyed it with the conception that every single thing was itself a contradiction, a unity of opposites, and that this internal contradiction was the basis of all movement. Hence, that all movement is self-movement.

It is only now, when Lenin is confronted with counter-revolution within the labor movement, that he moves boldly to sum up the essence of dialectic as the identity of opposites, the transformation into opposite, the unity of opposites:

"Briefly the dialectic can be defined as the doctrine of the unity of opposites. Thereby is the kernel of the dialectic grasped but that demands explanation and development."

It is now, when he has seen the counter-revolution within the revolutionary movement that he feels compelled to break with his former conception of the relationship between materialism and idealism:

"Alias:
Man's cognition not only reflects the objective world, but creates it."

He now reorganized completely his conception of the relationship of the materialistic or economic forces and that of human subjective forces, the relationship of science and human activity.

The keynote in his Philosophic Notebooks is nothing short of a restoration of truth of philosophic idealism against vulgar materialism to which he had given the green light in 1908 with his Materialism and Empirio-Criticism. Necessary as that book may have been for the specific purposes of Russia -- only Russia was so backward that in 1908 you still had to fight clericalism in the labor movement --

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he now writes boldly:

"(at the beginning of the 20th century) Marxists criticised the Kantians and Humists more in a Feuerbachian (and Buchnerian) manner than in a Hegelian manner."

The emphasis on the plural, Marxists, is Lenin's own.

By the end of the Hegelian studies, he will write:

"Intelligent idealism is nearer to intelligent materialism than is stupid materialism."

"Dialectic idealism instead of intelligent; metaphysical, undeveloped, dead, vulgar, stationary instead of stupid."

Of his former teacher, Plekhanov, revered as such, he now writes:

"Plekhanov wrote on philosophy (dialectic) probably nearly 1,000 pages (Belov / against Bogdanov / against Kantians / basic questions, etc. etc.) There is nil in them about the larger Logic, about it, ~~the~~ thoughts (i.e., the dialectic ~~as a~~ philosophy science)!!"

With himself, he is as merciless, giving no quarter, not even in the economic field:

"It is impossible completely to grasp Marx's Capital, and especially its first chapter, if you have not studied through and understood the Whole of Hegel's Logic. Consequently, none of the Marxists for the past half a century have understood Marx!"

Before 1915, Lenin had one view of Capital and philosophy. While war and the collapse of the Second International made him turn to the dialectic and changed his views, he didn't come blank to it. He had been a practicing revolutionary in Russia and was awed by the sharpness of the contradictions of that backward country. There is no more profound study of Volume II of Capital than that which Lenin had made at the turn of the century. There is no more profound grasp of the dialectic in action, that is to say, ~~as~~ as reason, than that which he made of the 1905 revolution. But he remained a Russian Marxist. He will now generalize that experience

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and apply it on a world scale. It isn't only politically that he had overnight been transformed from a Russian into an international Marxist, calling for the creation of a new, a Third International. There is no major work that follows his Philosophic Notebooks, all the way 'til his death, that is not permeated with the dialectic. It is the very warp and woof of all the works from Imperialism to the Split in the International; from the National Question to State and Revolution; from A Great Beginning to the Trade Union Debate; from his appearance at the last Congress of the Russian Communist Party he was ever to attend and warning about state-capitalism to his very Hill.

Krupskaya tells us that:

"In the autumn of 1916 and the beginning of 1917, Ilyich steeped himself in theoretical work. He strived to utilize all the time the library was open. He got there exactly at 9 o'clock. Never, I think, was Vladimir Ilyich in a more irreplaceable mood than during the last months of 1916 and early months of 1917."

The first thing he turned to directly after the Philosophic Notebooks was a concrete study of the latest stage of capitalism. For the first time he was no longer satisfied with the standard study of the latest stage of capitalist development, Hilferding's Finance Capital. He now embarked on an independent analysis. His voluminous notebooks, filling up 693 pages, for the small volume that will finally be published as Imperialism, shows how, in the concrete economic study, he holds tight to the dialectic. The published work itself will be a demonstration in economics of dialectic as the unity of opposites.

Prior to 1914, Marxists had treated cartels, trusts, syndicates, as mere "forms" of large-scale production, as part of a continuous development of capitalism. Capitalism seemed to be "organizing the economy," taking out its "planlessness" and thus making it easier

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for the workers "to take over" -- as if it were merely a matter of replacing one set of office holders with another. Now, however, Lenin treats monopoly not so much a part of continuous development as a development through contradiction, through transformation into opposites.

Competition was transformed into its opposite, monopoly. But monopoly didn't transcend competition. It coexists with it. It multiplies contradictions, deepens the crisis. Imperialism arose not out of capitalism in general, but out of capitalism as a specific stage "when its essential qualities became transformed into their opposites." Just as competition was transformed into its opposite, monopoly, a part of the proletariat was transformed into its opposite, the aristocracy of labor. That was the bulwark of the Second International. It caused its collapse.

The collapse of the Second International meant the breakdown of all previous thought and method of thought. The battle of reason now was to break up the rigidity to which understanding has reduced everything. Prior to 1914, Lenin had accepted a series of abstractions -- party, mass, revolution. Except in Russia, he never contrasted these with the struggles of the revolutionary masses even as he had previously failed to analyze the latest phase of world capitalism and seen the connection of the Second International with it. It is only that he saw that not only capitalism had changed but so had the labor organization because so had the labor living off the super-profits of capitalist imperialism. Now that he fully analyzed the objective reason for the collapse of the International, he questions the Social Democracy's very use of the phrase, mass organization. He denies it is.

See: Lenin, Selected Works, "Imperialism and Split in Socialism," Vol. xi pp. 743-763.

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It is first now that he "discovered" Marx's and Engels's attacks on the British proletariat which had become "bourgeoisified" and their pointing to the imperative need to go "deeper and lower" into the working class which the founders of modern socialism had carried on all the way from 1858 to 1892. He now calls it "the supremacy of Marxism." The liberating effect that this has on Lenin is that, with seeing that the division within labor discloses broader masses, ever deeper and lower, the unskilled, he is preparing himself for the dialectic in action which the workers will execute as new passions and forces that burst forth in the revolution.

The first to burst forth are the Irish. The Easter Rebellion of Ireland against British imperialist rule give an urgency to the National Question that it never before had. Previously, Lenin had been for the right of self-determination as a sort of principle. He had fought Rosa Luxemburg who thought Poland could "skip" that stage and go directly to socialism. But it was a theoretical debate. Now, however, it was a question of the day. The appearance within the Bolsheviks themselves, (Bukharin, Pyatakov) of a position against a struggle for national independence as an "outlived" question, calls forth from Lenin:

See: quotation on war suppressing reason in Gankin et al., Bolsheviks and World War.

He calls it nothing short of "imperialist economism." Lenin's "irreconcilable mood" has thus led from a struggle against those who betrayed directly, to those who tolerated the betrayers like Kautsky, of whom he now writes: "he is more harmful than all of them," to a struggle within his own Bolshevik group, who were for the extreme slogan of "Turn the imperialist war into civil war." This is not just

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a need and not limited to those who betray. Many revolutionaries, and Bukharin was one of them, became leaders in the greatest revolution in history, 1917, but never changed their method of thinking. This was a battle of reason and if you haven't changed your thinking, you will be sure, at the ~~next~~ great crisis to collapse.

That is why Lenin, as Krupskaya reports, "simply clutched" at the following sentence from Engels's criticism of the Erfurt Program:

"Such a policy can, in the end, only lead the Party on the wrong road. General, abstract, political questions are put in the foreground and thus obscure immediate, concrete questions which will automatically come up on the order of the day at the very first outbreak of big events, in the first political crisis."

Krupskaya notes (and we can see this in Lenin's Notes on Imperialism, which were published first in 1939):

"Having copied this passage, Ilyich wrote in very large letters, putting the words in double parentheses: ((THE ABSTRACT IN THE FOREGROUND, THE CONCRETE OBSCURED!!)) NOTA BENE! EXCELLENT! THIS'S THE MAIN THING! NB!"

Lenin himself had not seen this before. It had been written by Engels in 1891 of the draft of the founding program of the Second International. Kautsky had not published the criticism 'til 1901. But it was there from 1901 to 1914, that is up to the actual betrayal, before Lenin saw it. That is why he was so irreconcilable now. That is why theoretical questions were now dealt with, with such urgency: he was preparing himself to see the release of the energies of millions while the "others," including Bukharin, were preparing "plans." That is why he was not to forget it in his Will, in which he states that he thinks Bukharin has never quite grasped the dialectic and therefore cannot be considered "fully Marxist."

Thus, the great divide in Marxism is not alone with those who betray but with those, who, in thought, are near the dialectic, but never quite make it and thus cannot be considered "fully Marxists."

(Here, see: State and Revolution, and 1917 itself)

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