

Marxism-Leninism in a Changing World, I

By William Z. Foster

MARX AND ENGELS, in their great works, formulated the basic principles of Scientific Socialism. They laid bare the workings of the capitalist system, explained how the workers are exploited under that system, analyzed the formation and struggles of social classes, demonstrated Socialism to be the inevitable historic objective of the working class, outlined the elements of working-class strategy and tactics for reaching this goal, made a fundamental picture of the structure and operation of the future society, and gave the workers a new philosophy of life, dialectical materialism.

In performing this monumental task of scientific philosophy, analysis, forecast, organization, and struggle, the two great Socialist pioneers made it very clear that they were not creating a social blueprint or utopia, the lines of which were to be followed rigidly at all times and under every circumstance. On the contrary, being true scientists, what they founded was a social science, that of the proletariat; one which would necessarily evolve with the complex and ever-changing circumstances of the growing capitalist

system and the expanding struggle of the working class and its allies. From their time onward also, every outstanding Marxist has stressed again and again the fundamental reality that "Marxism is not a dogma, but a guide to action." At the same time, Marxists have resolutely fought against those opportunist elements who, prostituting the above basic principle, would lightly cast aside the established truths of Marxism.

Central in the whole history of Marxism has been the two-sided struggle: against the Right revisionists, who would liquidate Marxism in a bourgeois direction, and against the "Left" dogmatists, who would degrade Marxism to a sterile sectarianism. By the same token, the history of Marxism in the world class struggle is that of an expanding, evolving movement — theoretically, strategically, and organizationally. The life of world-wide Marxism is full of examples of the movement making rapid and drastic advances to meet new situations. This flexibility and potentiality to adapt itself to special and changing circumstances, while maintaining a firm

rip upon correct fundamental principles, is a basic reason why Marxism has made such tremendous progress throughout the world.

The most sweeping example of the adaptation of Marxism to changing conditions was Lenin's theoretical work, applying Marxist principles to world imperialism. Capitalism had reached its imperialist stage during the 1880-1900 period. The reformist leaders of the Second International met this situation by castrating their official Marxism and by adopting an opportunist line that was to lead them finally, along with their respective bourgeoisie, into the two rival imperialist camps in World War I. They thought they had done away forever with the revolutionary content of Marxism.

In the 1890's, however, Lenin began his epic work of analyzing imperialism and of strengthening Marxism to combat it. In doing this he added a whole new dimension to Marxism. Not only did Lenin re-erect and reaffirm the basic revolutionary principles of Marx and Engels regarding economics, the state, the class struggle, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and other vital questions, which the opportunists had buried; but on the basis of Marxist fundamentals, he also worked out a whole new analysis of capitalism in its imperialist stage. Imperialism was characterized as obsolete and decaying capitalism; the period of great wars and revolutions, the final

stage of the capitalist system. Lenin also developed a whole new strategy for the workers, embracing a revolutionary conception of the leading role of the Communist Party, the alliance between the workers and the peasantry, the cooperation between the workers in the imperialist countries and the peoples in the colonies, and a relentless struggle against Right opportunism and "Left" sectarianism. Under Lenin's general conceptions, the workers and peasants of Russia, China, and various other countries, comprising over one-third of the population of the world, have carried through successful revolutions, while the colonial peoples generally are tearing to pieces the remaining sections of the colonial system. So great were the theoretical and practical contributions of Lenin that thenceforth Marxism became "Marxism-Leninism."

There have since also been other important evolutionary advances in the development of Marxism-Leninism. One of the most significant of these was the concept of building Socialism in one country, instead of necessarily establishing it simultaneously in a whole row of countries, as previously widely believed. Lenin pioneered in this conception; but it was not until the late 1920's, after the death of Lenin, that the Soviet Communist Party, led by Stalin (in his most constructive period), developed this great concept fully and carried it through to a striking success.

Another great stride forward of Marxism-Leninism theoretically and tactically was the formulation of the people's front policy, chiefly by the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935. This was the policy of forming a broad alliance of the democratic, peace-loving forces, on both a national and an international scale, in common struggle against fascism and war. This was the Communist "new orientation" of the period. The policy greatly widened the fighting front of the workers, linking them up with awakened farmers, middle class masses, and bringing into eventual war alliance the Soviet Union and the bourgeois-democratic countries for joint struggle against world fascism.

The People's Democracies, formed in Central Europe—in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Albania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Eastern Germany—at the end of World War II, also involved a sharp expansion of Marxist-Leninist theory and practice. In this vital situation, embracing about 100,000,000 people in the heart of Europe, there were developed new types of government, based upon an alliance of war-time anti-fascist organizations, including bourgeois, nationalist, Catholic, and peasant parties, the formulation of new concepts of the dictatorship of the proletariat, without Soviets, and of new and relatively peaceful roads to Socialism.

The great Chinese People's revo-

lution, which, embracing over half a billion people, came to world-shaking victory in 1949, also marked radical advances in Marxist-Leninist theory and practice. Already in 1919, Lenin stated that the Chinese Communists faced a unique task, in that, "while relying upon the general theory and practice of Communism, you must adapt yourselves to particular conditions which do not exist in European countries." This is precisely what the Chinese Communist Party did under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung, with overwhelming success. And the doing of it required much pioneer Marxist theoretical work.

This involved the carrying through in China of a gigantic revolution on the basis of Marxist-Leninist ideology, in a country where the working class was extremely small in size; the virtual overleaping of the capitalist stage of social development, in proceeding almost directly from a near-feudalism to laying the basis for Socialism; the development of a revolutionary alliance, the basis of the new regime, which contains not only the workers, peasants, and middle classes, but also sections of the bourgeoisie; the development of drastically new methods of guerrilla warfare, etc., etc.

In China, as in Russia and Eastern Europe, the revolution could not have been successful had it not been for its basic Marxist-Leninist principles and also for the innovations

in its theory and practice which were developed to meet the specific conditions of the respective national struggles. To keep Marxism-Leninism a vibrant, growing evolving science is, therefore, a life and death question for the progress of world Socialism in general.

THE SWIFTLY ADVANCING WORLD

In the immediately recent period great constructive changes have occurred in the world, and others are daily taking place. They demand imperatively that Marxism-Leninism, the scientific theory and practice of the proletariat and its allies, must be kept abreast of all these vital national and international developments. Only in this manner can the forces of peace, democracy, and Socialism make their way through the jungle of decaying capitalism, and lead humanity, both in a successful present-day defense of its immediate interests and also along the road to the higher order, Socialism. Among the decisive developments that play a part in the present new and swiftly changing world situation, and with it also, in the constant evolution of Marxism-Leninism, are the following:

a) The stupendous growth of organized Socialism since the end of World War II. The number of people living under Socialism has leaped from some 200,000,000 in 1945

to over 900,000,000 in 1956, and most vital, Socialism now, instead of being confined to one nation, as it had been for two decades before World War II, has expanded into a great world system of Socialist regimes. Besides all this, internally the respective Socialist countries, above all the Soviet Union, are making tremendous headway in building up their economies in every phase. They are now also profoundly improving their democracy. Their progress in this respect outdoes anything ever accomplished by capitalism in all its history. The question of realizing Lenin's great slogan of Socialism, of "overtaking and surpassing" capitalism, has now become a matter of daily speculation and worry in world bourgeois circles. Militarily, in industry, science, education, and many other spheres, Socialism has already demonstrated its great superiority over capitalism. All this is of epochal importance, politically, economically, and ideologically. It opens up wide new horizons of political-theoretical expansion.

b) A post-war development also of major significance, which also involves spurring Marxism into new theoretical heights, is the gigantic spread of the colonial liberation movement. Together with the freeing of semi-colonial China, several other countries have won their independence—India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Burma, Ceylon, Egypt, Syria, the Sudan, Lebanon, etc. Asia and

the whole Middle East are stirring from end to end with colonial revolt, and so is Africa. Latin America, long dominated by American and British imperialism, is also beginning to awaken. All over the world, colonialism, a key foundation of the capitalist system, is definitely collapsing. The anti-war, anti-imperialist former colonies now constitute a great peace zone, the symbol of which was the recent Bandung conference. This huge new world force is increasingly hostile to warlike American imperialism and friendly to the peace-loving USSR. The stupendous progressive development constitutes a real challenge to the flexibility of the Marxist-Leninists of the world, in helping these countries to industrialize themselves, to maintain world peace, to guard their independence, to unite in a common anti-imperialist front with the workers in the capitalist lands, to find new routes to Socialism in this vast sphere of action, with its countless new problems, theoretical rigidity and dogmatism would be fatal, and political flexibility is a supreme necessity for Communists.

c) A further highly significant development of world political importance during the post-World War II years, deeply affecting Marxist thinking and policies, is the enormous growth of the workers' industrial and political organizations that has taken place throughout the world, both capitalist and Socialist. On the

eve of World War II, in 1939, the approximate number of trade unionists in the world was 60 million, of whom about 25 million lived in the Soviet Union; by 1956, however, the grand total had mounted to some 150 million, about 75 million of them in the many Socialist lands. The Communist parties, the cooperative movement, and the peace, women and youth organizations have also made spectacular growth. This enormous increase in the democratic strength of the workers and their allies, particularly in the capitalist world, requires much new thinking on such questions as labor unity, joint political action, the role of present-day Social Democracy, and many others. Imperatively, narrow viewpoints and outworn attitudes of the past must be overcome.

d) The opposite side to the above world picture of growing Socialism is presented by the declining capitalist system, which is in general crisis. This crisis, as we have seen, is marked by such elementary factors as the loss by capitalism of many countries to Socialism, the break-up of the colonial system, the growth of powerful anti-capitalist forces within the capitalist countries, the sharpening of inter-imperialist antagonisms, and the like. By the same token, the decline of world capitalism also presents many vital problems in theory and practice to Marxist-Leninists, which cannot be solved by doctrinaire rote. These re-

late to such matters as the character and scope of cyclical crises in the present situation; the significance of Keynesian policies of industrial stimulation, designed to master the cyclical economic crisis, and with it the general crisis of capitalism; the question of capitalist mutual antagonisms in this period; the possibility of imperialist war taking place; the extent and substance of American capitalist hegemony, and many more. All of these questions demand bold new thinking by Marxist-Leninists.

e) A recent development, also full of dynamic possibilities for the constructive forces of the world, was the serious setback, if not decisive defeat, of the war drive of American imperialism by the peoples of the world, as dramatized at the Geneva "summit" conference of July, 1955. This war drive, initiated by Wall Street at the end of World War II and aiming at an atomic world war for world domination, eventually provoked an arms race and the creation of a military machine without precedent in peace times. But the campaign of American Big Business for world mastery was blocked by the counter-building up of a gigantic military force by the Socialist countries; the breaking of the American atom-bomb monopoly by the Russians; the defeats administered to world imperialist armies by the troops of People's China, North Korea, and Indo-China; and the intense mobilization by the World

Peace Council and other democratic forces of the overwhelming peace sentiment of the world. This vast, years-long peace struggle came to a victorious climax at Geneva, when Wall Street imperialism was compelled to relax its war menace, at least for the time being, if not finally.

Geneva, by reducing the war threat, was an historic victory for the world peace forces. It made the great policy of peaceful co-existence a vivid possibility among all the nations; it is beginning to ease the peoples of the world of the crushing burden of armaments and of the corroding fear of atomic war; it has generated a new and more hopeful spirit throughout the world; and, by minimizing labor's internal disputes over the war issue, it has bettered the chances for the unification of the world labor movement.

f) A further development, with far-reaching implications for Communists and others, in the fields of both theory and practice, is the "downgrading" of Stalin that is now taking place. In his earlier years, Stalin, as head of the Communist Party and the Soviet state, undoubtedly did much excellent work; but in later years he was guilty, working falsely in the name of the Revolution, of many gross excesses. Thus he developed his so-called "cult of the individual," expressed by extreme bureaucracy, one-man leadership, political brutality, the setting of artistic

standards and scientific truth by fiat, etc. All this did great harm to the Soviet Union and to the cause of Socialism throughout the world. The cult of the individual of Stalin was greatly facilitated by the fact that the Soviet people, encircled by hostile capitalist powers and struggling almost desperately to industrialize the country, to hold dangerous counter-revolutionary forces in check, to build a defensive army, and to beat back the Hitlerite invaders, lived for many years in almost semi-military conditions. In these adverse circumstances, dictatorship practices could grow and did. Now, however, upon the initiative of the leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Stalin undemocratic cult is being liquidated root and branch. This process is producing many new problems of progress in the USSR and abroad, problems of democracy, collective leadership, relationships among Communist states and parties, which are fairly clamoring for solution.

THE RE-EMPHASIS UPON MARXISM-LENINISM

The present rapid change in the relationship of forces between those of world capitalism and world Socialism is especially prolific with new responsibilities in theory and practice for Marxist-Leninists. This change in international relationships constantly favors the forces of world

Socialism. Indeed, it is now timely to begin to consider whether or not the world's workers have passed the "summit," so to speak, along the road of their historic march to Socialism. This is no matter of mere idle speculation, but a question of real importance; for once the workers get on the "downhill pull," the circumstances of the class struggle will alter radically in their favor. It will also present them with a host of uniquely new problems. That the workers are now somewhere in the "summit" zone, on one side or the other, is pretty obvious.

One thing is certain, however: **there is much struggle ahead.** Although most probably the democratic forces will be able to insist upon a world policy of peaceful co-existence in the years to come, nevertheless it would be nonsense to suppose that the capitalists will surrender without making the maximum resistance of which they are capable. Their ruthlessness in this respect has been made all too clear to the workers during two centuries of class struggle—involving tens of thousands of strikes, hellish conditions in industry, the fighting through of many revolutions and two devastating world wars, the hard struggle to prevent a third great war, the bitter fight against fascist enslavement, etc. In view of all this, it would be folly to have any other than a fighting perspective for the

period before us, summit or no summit.

A basic difference between the period ahead and that behind us, however, is that, with their vastly increased strength nationally and internationally, the workers and their allies are far better equipped at present to curb and defeat the violence of the capitalists than they have been in the past. And to do just this curbing has become a central policy of the democratic masses internationally. Already these masses, with the greatest peace movement in history, have shown during the past few years, that they are quite able to prevent the imperialists from launching another world war. They are also, in the various countries, making it more and more difficult for the capitalists to use violence to beat back the progressive movements of the masses. This increased curbing of capitalist violence is the decisive reason why the perspective for peaceful co-existence among all nations has become a realistic one, and also why Marxist-Leninists can now speak of the possibility for a constitutional and relatively peaceful advance to Socialism in various countries. The day is past when the capitalists can freely wage imperialist war against each other and also practice unrestrained violence against the workers. It would be a grave error, however, to conclude therefrom that the danger of fascism and war is already done away with.

A basic implication of the per-

spective of struggle now standing before the world's toiling masses, both in the colonial lands and in the imperialist nations—the United States, Great Britain, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, etc.—is the continued validity of Marxism-Leninism as the inspiring, guiding and organizing philosophy of the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggle. This is no less true of the United States, which is the hard core of capitalist resistance to the advancing world working class. It is an elementary reality that must not be lost sight of by us.

By the same token, the perspective also re-emphasizes the role of the Communist Party, based upon Marxism-Leninism, as the vanguard political party of the proletariat and of the peoples in general. All this implies, however, that, under the pressure of the rapidly changing world situation, Marxism-Leninism must grow and evolve in a theoretical, strategical, and tactical sense. It means, too, that the Communist parties must adopt innovations in their structures and disciplines, and in their relationships with each other and with people's organizations generally. Marxism-Leninism is adaptable to every need of the toiling masses in the imperialist countries, in the colonial lands, and internationally. Marxism-Leninism, resolute, clear-sighted, and flexible, has led the peoples to the establishment of Socialism in one-third of the world and it has put the whole sys-

tem of world capitalism a-totter; it alone also can provide the indispensable guidance for the completion of the victory of Socialism in the rest of the world.

In the crucial period now developing for the world forces of peace, democracy and Socialism, it is especially necessary, too, that Marxist-Leninists should realize clearly just which is the most serious danger, "Left" sectarianism or Right opportunism, that they have to combat within their own ranks. Communists always fight deviations on two fronts, the Right and the "Left"—the question being where to put the most emphasis.

During the time of the First International—1864-1876—the main danger was that of "Left" sectarianism. While there were harmful Right opportunists at hand—mostly British labor union bureaucrats—the worst danger was presented by the "Left" sectarian Anarchists (Bakuninists), who tried to force the young labor movement into decisive revolutionary struggles, for which it was not ready. This group finally wrecked the International. Throughout the period, however, when the Second International led the world labor movement—1889-1914—the main danger was Right opportunism, although the Leftist Syndicalist movement was also a big deviating factor. The Right-wing elements, whose aim was

to subordinate the workers' interests to those of the imperialists, eventually came to dominate the International and they finally led it to overwhelming disaster in the imperialist World War I.

In the period which is now developing, once more "Left" sectarianism is becoming the main danger in the Communist parties, because it acts as a brake upon the Communists and other Left forces in their imperative need to give a broader leadership to the awakening masses of workers, peasants, middle-class elements, and other democratic strata, who want to fight the capitalists. Right-wing tendencies are, of course, also strong, and as always, radiating liquidationism and opportunism, they must be fought; but the "Left" dogmatists and sectarians can be even more harmful in the years ahead. They block the cultivation of the possible new cooperative united front relationships with Social Democrats, farmers, the Negro people, Catholic workers, and others. To carry on the necessarily far broader line of struggle in the coming period will require not only real flexibility of program and action, but also a progressive spirit theoretically—all of which is foreign to the "Left" sectarians, whose narrow tendencies isolate the Communists from the masses.

The concluding installment of this article will appear in our next issue.—Ed.