

## **INSTITUTE RESOURCE PAPER #2: MARXISM AS THE SCIENTIFIC CURRENT WITHIN COMMUNISM**

How can we increase and strengthen the ranks of revolutionaries in this country? This paper discusses Marxism as a particular current within the movement for communism.

Marxism is a science; communism is a goal. Grasping this relation, on the one hand, liberates us to unite with the practical, spiritual or historical strivings of our people for a just and peaceful world, the actual strivings for communism. On the other hand, it commands us to use the science of society to sharpen our understanding of the inevitable development of the line of march of the revolution and to act more effectively as conscious revolutionaries.

### **THE MOVEMENT FOR COMMUNISM**

History has seen some very different expressions of the movement for communism. There have been countless impulses toward communism that come out of the need to resolve specific problems, for example the peasant communalism of 19th century Russia, or the scattered communes in this country in the 19th and early 20th centuries. And even today legacies of pre-class societies remain, for example, in the communalism that still has a place in Native American culture.

Historically, there have also been various opposing theoretical trends within the conscious communist movement. The 19th century anarchist Kropotkin, on the one hand, eloquently painted the picture of a communist vision of "well-being for all" and, on the other hand, argued for the anarchist theory on how to achieve the communist reorganization of society. And Marx and Engels refuted the utopian socialists, who had

no scientific description of how society as a whole could or would achieve their vision of a communal and peaceful life.

More socially significant today are what we might call ideological trends within communism -- doctrines or ideologies whose general goal or vision is a world of peace, justice, equality and brotherhood. Most deeply rooted in the American culture are the religious teachings that embrace communism as the realization of the faith. They draw on statements like this one attributed to St. Gertrude: "Property: the more common it is, the holier it is." Many spiritually motivated people struggle to get the church to live up to what they consider to be the true doctrine of Christianity -- partisan to the poor and uncompromising on the side of justice. On the more organized side, there are the theoreticians and practitioners of liberation theology.

New methods of production always clash with old forms of distribution of the goods of society. The industrial revolution raised the question of the distribution of the wealth and opened the way for discussing the possibility of a new communist society.

Today, however, the electronic revolution takes this one step further. Electronics has created a new class whose struggle to survive cannot be realized within the capitalist system. The LA rebellion in 1992 and the continued spread of housing takeovers across the country are a few expressions of this. In this sense, it is a movement for communism in that the striving of people for what they need is a striving for a redistribution of the wealth, which, under these conditions, can only be accomplished through a reorganization of society along communist lines. Communism is, on the one hand, a vision of the way the world should be; on the other hand, it is the organization of society to achieve that goal.

## MARXISM AS A SCIENTIFIC WORLD OUTLOOK, A PHILOSOPHIC SYSTEM

Marxism is in a different category. Marxism has evolved as both a science and a doctrine.

Marxism-the-science describes the laws that govern the development of societies. The most succinct description of these laws is laid out in the famous paragraph from the Preface to the Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy. These laws can be grasped and utilized by revolutionaries to understand the stage of development of the class struggle, and as such can provide a kind of guide to action. It is the science of society. The science of Marxism applies dialectics — the understanding of how things develop and change -- to societies. It solves the question of the relation between the objective and the subjective in making history. Marxist communists base their understanding of history, society and change on a scientific approach, on theories based on observation and tested in reality. Marxist communists utilize science as revolutionaries engaged with the world - - that is, not just trying to "interpret the world, but to change it."

Marxism-the-doctrine, on the other hand, describes the application of Marxism-the-science at a given stage of the development of society, and thus must evolve and change as the development of the productive forces change, and with it, the environment of the class struggle.

Marx and Engels described communism as a vision of what the world should be and how society should be organized to make that possible; but they also used science to spell out exactly what it would take to lay the basis for such a society. For example, "In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly -- only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!" (Critique of the Gotha Program) In this sense, we can speak of "communist productive relations," and "communist ideology." In other words, communism is a form of organization of society, something that Marxism-the-science can describe, "predict," analyze, etc.

Marxism tells us how to get there, what objective forces are unleashed that allow us as conscious revolutionaries to play our role and guarantee that the practical and ideological

forces that are heading to communism can get there most directly and with the least human sacrifice.

Utilizing the science of society, Marxists identify the process of polarization and leap within society, the forces that are objectively heading for communism, and so on. Specifically, today we are able to identify how the economic revolution is also creating a new class, a class whose strivings are unstoppable and in collision with capitalism.

Marxism, therefore, gives us the ability to determine the line of march of history and class struggle toward the vision we share with millions of others; it equips us to play the most aggressive role within it. The science of Marxism uses the dialectical method and the materialist approach to understanding the world and to changing it.

## CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

We can unite with religious communism and other ideological currents that place the physical and spiritual well being of the masses of people above the avarice and pleasures of the filthy rich. These ideologies speak to the objective strivings and social motion of millions of people for a better world.

The question is how do we get there? Marx and Engels put the strivings of the communist movement on a scientific basis. Their writings often critiqued and challenged others in the movement, particularly the "utopian socialists." The roots of the "utopian socialists," they observed, pre-dated the development of industrial capitalism, and with it, the formation of the industrial working class. As a result, the utopian socialists could not and therefore did not see any important role for the working class in the socialist struggle. "But the proletariat, as yet in its infancy," wrote Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto, "offers to them [the utopian socialists] the spectacle of a class without any historical initiative or any independent political movement." Likewise, today, the "utopian communists," in the absence of science, fail to see a new class forming alongside of the new productive forces, and consequently fail to see that this class has any "historical initiative." Many types of communists may have a vision of a communist society, but communists whose outlook is based on the science of society are able to

identify the emerging forces that will bring about that society and determine what that means for their activity.

Today the creation of a new class changes the political climate. The various spiritual strivings for communism take on a new meaning and even a new strength now that there is a new class struggle. And in a real way, the creation of a new class opens the way for new class struggle, new politics, and new types of organizations of revolutionaries.

The economic polarization in our society is sharper than in any country in the "industrialized world." We are seeing the beginning of a period where the politics and ideology of a relatively unpolarized economy give way to the ideology and politics of a society wrenched by economic polarization. This will continue to unfold in ways that we can't yet imagine, in forms that may be wildly different from the forms we are familiar with, that is, quite different from the days of the movements connected with the national liberation struggle. We are seeing the beginning of a broad – but confused and undirected - practical movement for the redistribution of wealth. We have to work to unite that very broad objective movement for communism with its cause, to show that the way to realize its actual goal is through the reorganization of society.

Grasping the relation between the general communist movement and Marxism as the scientific current within it, and, at the same time, anticipating the extent of the movement for communism, focuses us on several tasks.

All revolutionaries today need to spread the vision, ideology and morality of communism. This also means finding the appropriate ways to unite with others that are doing that.

We Marxists will work most effectively within these broad strivings toward communism when we keep Marxism where it belongs, i.e., as a science and methodology. To see our way through each particular stage of the revolution, we need a scientific -- that is a dialectical and materialist -- approach to identifying the process of change in society and the particular role and tasks of the conscious element.

Within this process and dialectically connected to it is the need to broaden and strengthen the core of Marxists within this stage, to carry out the tasks of this moment and at the same time to prepare for the next stage of the revolution.

[Note: This paper was presented at a conference on political education held in Chicago June 1995]