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# Socialism: Crisis and Hope

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Ten years ago when that dreadful symbol of communist tyranny, the Berlin Wall, came crashing down, it was widely assumed that Marxism has been buried under its debris once and for all. The industrialized West saw in the collapse of Soviet and East European socialism the definitive vindication of capitalism as the only valid and viable form of social and economic organization. In the centres of international capitalism, there was much euphoria. In the less developed nations which had adopted the socialist model of development, there was dismay and a sense of loss. Then for nearly a decade capitalism reigned unchallenged. Globalization assumed the status of a natural law; liberalization became the new economic *mantra*; privatization was prescribed as a panacea for all economic ills; state intervention in the economy was declared a taboo. The socialist idea, it seemed, has been definitively discredited. Capitalism was all set to march into the new millennium as the only viable, if not the most desirable, system of economic organization for humankind.

But a strange thing happened on the way to the millennium! In 1998, barely ten years after socialism was declared dead, on the 150th anniversary of the Communist Manifesto, the 'spectre of communism' returned to haunt the world. Unexpected developments in a number of countries across the world suggested that the obituary of socialism might have been written rather prematurely.

Russia's honeymoon with capitalism ended in disaster. Television images of restive Russian crowds, jostling to enter banks and withdraw whatever is left of their drastically devalued savings, told the grim story of how badly capitalism can go wrong. A decade of liberalization and free-market economy has left the Russian economy on the verge of bankruptcy. The Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, who dislodged the communists from power only a decade ago, was forced to appoint a communist, Primakov, Prime Minister in order to clean up the mess created by the country's fling with capitalism.

Close on the heels of the Russian debacle, the Tiger Economies of the East and South East Asia, the show-pieces of capitalist success, collapsed like a domino, threatening to induce a global economic crisis. There are already signs of Latin America becoming the next domino. "Even USA, whose booming economy once looked insulated from the typhoon hitting the world markets, is now feeling the blast – its stock markets have lost billions of dollars in market capitalisation" (Aiyar 1998, 19).

Meanwhile, there are unmistakable signs of a changing ideological climate in several parts of the world. In country after country in Western Europe, the Leftist forces have staged a remarkable come-back. "Germany is a Bonn-again pinko. It is only the latest country in Europe to have been so seduced. Italy and France have Socialist leaders; in Britain, Thatcherism has been replaced by the Third Way which is as much Left as Right. The Iron Curtain isn't about to fall once more over Russia, but Bleary Boris had to accept the communist Primakov as prime minister. Asian Tigers are licking the wounds inflicted by their passionate embrace of capitalism" (The Sunday Times of India, October 25, 1998, 13). There is wide-spread disillusionment in the World Bank-IMF inspired capitalist solutions to the economic woes of the world. Some feel that the belated award of 1998 Nobel Prize for Economics to Professor Amartya Sen, the foremost proponent of welfare economics, is a clear signal of which way the ideological wind is blowing (Sharma 1998, 13).

What do these developments portend for the future? Do they suggest that the world is taking a "Left" turn as it approaches the new millennium? This is a question that is being intensely debated today not only in scholarly discourses but also in political circles and the media. Predictably, the discussion is polarized along ideological lines. At one end of the ideological spectrum, there are those who believe that the recent events signal the demise of capitalism and the return of comrade Marx to the world stage, this time to stay. The leading British thinker, Eric Hobsbawm, for example, believes: " In 1998 Karl Marx came back . . . Ten years after the irreversible triumph of liberalism and the end of history had been proclaimed, here he is back in circulation to everyone's surprise, including the ageing family of the old Marxists . . ." (1998, 11).

Not surprisingly, those at the other end of the ideological spectrum read the current events differently. They feel that the present crisis does not pose any serious threat to capitalism. Leading Indian economist, Swaminathan S. Anklesaria Aiyar, is a representative of this school. He observes: "Many countries and companies are going bust, and a global recession may soon engulf us. Never mind. In capitalism recessions and bankruptcies are not aberrations; they are signals telling you something is wrong and needs rectification. They do not sound the death-knell of capitalism; they merely ring an alarm bell to signify it is time capitalism re-engineered itself once again" (1998, 19). A similar view is expressed by Chandan Mitra:

> The recent ascendancy of the neo-Left in Western Europe . . . does not amount to anything more than a minor course correction in the path of capitalism's agenda of globalization. Throughout history, the neo-Left has acted as the acceptable face of capitalism, introducing humane correctives at times when capitalism's unacceptable face – of rapacity and rampant exploitation – has threatened to cause a permanent fissure in society. With the collapse of the Socialist model in the erstwhile Soviet Union and its vassal states in Eastern

> Europe and the impending demise of China's delightfully hypocritical concept of 'market socialism', the soft correctives periodically offered by the reformed Left are an integral part of the capitalist world order (1998, 13).

It is too early to determine whether the current crisis represents the return of socialism or only a minor course correction in the path of capitalism. Be that as it may, it does seem evident that to the dispossessed and marginalised sections in society, capitalism as it functions today offers little hope for dignity and decent living. For them socialism still retains its relevance as a rallying ground for the struggle to build a better future for themselves and their children. It is from their perspective that this paper examines socialism's past and explores its possibilities for the future. This inquiry, therefore, is informed by the belief in the superior moral potential of the socialist ideal and by the hope it enshrines of a humane future for the wretched of the earth.

It is generally conceded by Marxists and Non-Marxists alike that the socialism of the future, if indeed it has a future, will have to be significantly different from the socialism of the past, both as a theoretical construct and as a political project. There is, of course, no agreement on the emotionally charged issue of the relationship between Marxism as an intellectual achievement and Marxism as a political movement. This is an issue that bears some resemblance to the question, for example, of the relationship between Christianity and the Inquisition. Critics of Christianity have asserted that the two are linked directly and inseparably; defenders have argued that any connection between the two is accidental, and at best indirect. While the exact nature of the relationship is a moot point, it is beyond doubt that the theoretical formulations of socialism did have an influence on the structure and dynamics of the socialist states. The first part of this paper will examine some of the ambiguities and distortions in Marx's theory, especially those which might have directly or indirectly contributed to the failure of socialism. The second part will highlight the lessons to be drawn from the vagaries of socialism in the past for the socialism of the future.

## I. Marxian Theory: Ambiguities and Distortions

Marx's voluminous writings bristle with inconsistencies and ambiguities. Within the brief compass of this paper, it is not possible to review all of these in great detail. Here we shall focus on three aspects of Marxist theory, the materialist interpretation of history, the critique of capitalism and the vision of the socialist society.

### 1. Materialist Interpretation of History

Hegelian Idealism, the reigning philosophy of Marx's time, understood historical evolution as the progressive self-realization of the Idea. In Hegel's view "ideas 'create' history and determine its form, and history itself – that is, the human narrative – must be seen as the embodiment of ideas realized in events" (Heilbroner 1980, 63). Claiming to have stood Hegel on his feet, Marx proposed the materialist interpre-

tation of history, which he summarized in the *Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* as follows :

> The general result at which I arrived . . . can be briefly formulated as follows: in the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitute the economic structure of society, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life-process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness (Selected Works 1, 1969, 503-4).

In this perspective, what gives meaning, thrust and direction to history is the actual engagement of human beings with their material circumstances, most importantly, the constant and indispensable activity of ensuring the reproduction of their subsistence. As Engels points out in *Anti-Dühring*, this implies that " . . . the ultimate causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in the minds of men, in their increasing insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the mode of production and exchange; they are to be sought not in the *philosophy* but in the *economics* of the epoch concerned" (Heilbroner 1980, 64.)

The materialist interpretation of history poses two difficult problems: *(a)* of defining exactly which activities fall under the *economic* category and *(b)* of determining the nature and degree of influence the economic base exerts on the superstructure.

The material base of a society presumably consists of those activities necessary to assure the survival and reproduction of its members. This includes its economic life, namely, the totality of those activities related to ongoing production and distribution of the goods and services necessary for the subsistence and survival of its members. However, these economic activities do not exist independently nor operate autonomously. The economic base can function only when a host of actions that are not 'economic' in the conventional sense are performed. There cannot be activity among men without social relationships that bind them; and these are as much political, legal and moral as they are economic. As Bober points out:

> A productive order cannot legitimately be presented as the primary and independent variable to which institutions seek to accommodate themselves. The mode of production is itself charged with institutional connotations without which it can have no content and no existence. It is permeated with attributes of property, inequality of possessions, status, contract and other arrangements. Religion, superstition, art, and taboos were an integral part of productive activities in early time; property and human relations, sanctioned by law, are in organic relation to such activities in more modern times; always non-economic institutions, conceptions, and

> mores are indispensable aspects, if not the very heart, of systems of production. The emphasis is to fall on interrelations and not on polarities (1965, 323).

The materialist interpretation of history presupposes a clear demarcation of the base structure from the superstructure, the economic sector from the non-economic sectors. However, the intermingling of economic activities with non-economic activities, the inevitable fusion of ideational and material elements throughout society, make it difficult, if not impossible, to clearly demarcate the material (economic) sphere from the non-material sphere. Therefore, according due importance to the role of non-economic institutions and ideational elements in human affairs without losing its distinctive materialist emphasis has always been a difficult problem in Marx's interpretation of history.

A second area of ambiguity in Marx's materialist interpretation relates to the relationship between the economic and non-economic sectors of society. This relationship has been variously formulated by Marx and Engels: that the base structure alone "explains" all the institutions and ideas of a given epoch; that definite social forms of consciousness "correspond" to the economic basis; and that the base structure is the "ultimate cause," the "great moving power," the "final cause," the "determining element in the last instance," in history.

These expressions clearly suggest that Marx and Engels meant to assert a causal relation between the base structure or the mode of production and the superstructure of institutions and ideas. The problem is in determining what kind of a cause the base structure is. Engels in a letter written to Joseph Bloch on September 21, 1890 has strongly refuted all attempts to interpret historical materialism as some kind of crude economic determinism:

> According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if anybody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure: political forms of the class struggle and its results . . . also exercise their influence upon the course of historical struggles, and in many cases preponderate in determining their form . . . (Selected Works, 3, 1970, 487).

If economy is not the one and only causal variable, the question remains as to what kind of a cause it is. The renowned historian and Marxist scholar Leszek Kolakowski in his magisterial three-volume study, *Main Currents of Marxism,* poses the problem sharply:

> We must ask then, what exactly is historical materialism? If it means that every detail of the superstructure can be explained as in some way dictated by the demands of the 'base', it is an absurdity with nothing to recommend it to credence; while if, as Engels' remarks suggest, it does not involve absolute determinism in this sense, it

is no more than a fact of common knowledge. If interpreted rigidly, it conflicts with elementary demands of rationality; if loosely, it is a mere truism (1978, 364).

The traditional way out of this unhappy predicament is to invoke Engels' conception of the economy as the "ultimately determining element in history." However, the meaning the phrase "ultimately determining" remains unclear. Engels probably meant that economy is the primary, the most basic, or the decisive causal factor in history. However, at any given time in any historical period a multitude of factors are interacting with each other; together they explain what is happening in the social system at a given point in time. It is not possible to determine with any scientific exactitude which factor is primary and which is secondary, which is proximate and which is ultimate.

A less rigorous interpretation of historical materialism is that the economy determines the superstructure in the negative sense of setting limits for the kind of sociopolitical arrangements that are compatible with it. This would mean, for example, that the superstructure of a slave society would be incompatible with the base structure of a feudalist or capitalist society, and vice versa; nevertheless, a given economic foundation can give rise to a variety of compatible superstructures.

Historical materialism, understood in either sense, cannot live up to its claim of being an all-embracing grand theory of history, which accounts for the past, analyses the present, and confidently predicts the future. One can hardly disagree with Kolakowski's conclusion: "Considered as a theory explaining all historical change by technical progress and all civilization by class struggle, Marxism is unsustainable. As a theory of the interdependence of technology, property relationships, and civilization, it is trivial" (1978, 369).

Nevertheless, as Kolakowski himself goes on to state: "All this does not mean that Marx's principles of historical investigation are empty or meaningless. On the contrary, he has profoundly affected our understanding of history, and it is hard to deny that without him our researches would be less complete and accurate than they are . . ." (1979, 369-370). Indeed, if today it is universally acknowledged that we cannot understand the history of ideas unless we see them as expressions of the lives of the societies in which they arose, it is largely the result of Marx's thought.

As a monistic theory in search of universalist solutions, historical materialism is of dubious value. However, as a method of analysis that takes seriously the insight that a community's spiritual and intellectual life is not self-contained and wholly autonomous but is invariably also reflections of its material interests, it offers an invaluable heuristic principle to the students of social life.

## 2. Critique of Capitalism

Paradoxically, the object of Marx's life-long attention was something that he loathed and wanted to see dismantled: the mode of production

called capitalism. The theoretical formulations of Historical Materialism were merely the premises from which he launched his life's project. His critique of capitalism boils down to the claim that it was inherently an exploitative, imperialistic and dehumanizing system, a system so rife with inner contradictions that its historical development will create the conditions for its own doom and pave the way for a socialist society.

"Marx defines capitalism as a system of society in which the instruments of production are operated for the private profit of those who own them by means of the labour of workers who are neither slaves or serfs but freemen" (Hook 1955, 28). Profit, according to Marx, is the *raison d'etre* of capitalism. To explain how profit arises and why it amounts to exploitation, Marx proposed the theory of value and its corollary, the theory of surplus value.

Marx suggested that what determines the exchange value of a commodity is the amount of *socially necessary labour* that has gone into its making. By *socially necessary labour,* Marx meant the average amount of labour that would be required to produce a commodity at a given level of technological development. Though different kinds of labour – skilled and unskilled labour, for example – are not directly comparable, Marx believed that it is possible to convert them into homogeneous units of simple labour. In capitalism, the worker sells his labour-power as a commodity in the market and the capitalist purchases it at its value like any other commodity. The value of labour-power is computed like the value of other commodities, that is, in terms the amount of socially necessary labour required to generate it. For example, the amount of socially necessary labour required to produce labour-power for eight hours would be equivalent to the money required to sustain the labourer and his dependents in good physical condition for a day.

Labour-power has a special attribute that sets it apart from all other commodities. It can create more value than its market value. That is to say, labour-power can create more labour that the value of labour-power. For example, a labourer who works for eight hours can produce the value equivalent to eight hours of labour in less than eight hours, say, in six hours, which would be the *necessary labour time*. The additional value yielded in the remaining two hours (*surplus labour time*) is surplus value or profit. "The value of labour-power will always be less than the value a capitalist will receive from the commodities that this labour-power will produce" (Heilbroner 1980,108). Labour, according to Marx, is the one and only source of profit in capitalism.

The worker is remunerated only for the value of his labour-power, and not for the actual value that his labour-power creates. Profit is unpaid labour. Therefore, when capitalism derives profit, it exploits. In such a system, the worker is alienated from nature, self, and society. This alienation in the economic base is reproduced in different aspects of the superstructure, such as politics, law, arts, science, religion, and philosophy.[1]

Capitalism is essentially an unstable system, according to Marx. The urge to make ever greater profit under conditions of intense competition will force the capitalists to continuously expand and mechanize production. Expansion will result in large-scale production (concentration), the rise of monopoly (centralisation) and the progressive decline of competition. Mechanisation will mean decreasing deployment of labour in the production process, and as the investment in machines and technology (constant capital) increases and proportion of labour decreases, the rate of profit declines. The falling rate of profit and the consequent pauperisation of the working class will plunge capitalism repeatedly into economic crises.[2] Crippled by recurring economic crises, it will finally be overthrown by a disillusioned proletariat in a revolutionary class struggle.

Marxian theory of value and surplus value is rife with difficulties. First, Marx's contention that labour is the only measure of value and that the varieties of human labour, mental and physical, skilled and unskilled, can all be reduced to homogeneous and comparable units of simple labour seems arbitrary and implausible. Second, the conception that labour is the only source of value, and that capital, machinery and other labour-saving devices do not add any value to commodities is open to question, as it does not seem to accord with the facts of exchange.

The law of falling rate of profit, as Kolakowski observes, "appears to be no more than an expression of Marx's hope that capitalism would be destroyed by its own inconsistencies. Only empirical observation, and not deduction from the nature of the profit rate, can tell us whether it does tend permanently to decline; and such observation is not found to confirm Marx's theory" (1978, 298). Similarly, Marx's theory of "increasing misery" (pauperisation) of the masses also has not been borne out by subsequent history of capitalism, if what he means is increasing physical impoverishment.[3]

Much more successful were Marx's predictions regarding the tendency towards concentration and centralization in capitalism. His predictions regarding business cycles, recurring crises and the necessity of imperialist expansion have also been vindicated by history. However, in hindsight, Marx failed to anticipate capitalism's resourcefulness to re-engineer itself to overcome its periodic crises, the power of organized labour to exact higher wages and better working conditions through bargaining, the role some states would play to ensure social security and a more egalitarian distribution of income, and the overall improvement in health and living standards of the population.

## 3. Vision of the Socialist Society

The dream of a socialist society and the struggle to realize it are the life-giving forces that sustain Marx's work. However, Marx's main preoccupation was the analysis of capitalism, to lay bare its inner contradictions which, when played out, would seal its doom and set the stage for the emergence of the socialist society. Therefore, he de-

voted very little attention to the structure of the socialist society that he assumed would succeed capitalism. Although Marx did not leave us a detailed account of the future society he envisaged, its basic principles are spelt out in the following passage from *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*:

> Communism is the positive abolition of private property, of human self-alienation, and thus the real appropriation of human nature through and for man. It is, therefore, the return of man himself as a *social,* i.e, really human being, a complete and conscious return which assimilates all the wealth of previous development. Communism as a fully developed naturalism is humanism and as a fully developed humanism is naturalism. It is the definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and nature, and between man and man. It is the true solution of the conflict between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and the species. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be the solution (Fromm 1963, 127).

Capitalism accomplished the conquest of nature; socialism represents the conquest of man. "Working class has conquered nature; now it must conquer man," (Marx in People's Paper, 18 March, 1854). In capitalism the workers are dominated and enslaved by their own products, a situation Marx characterized as the "fetishism of commodities." Socialism will create the conditions in which human beings are fully in control of their labour-power and creative energies, so that the products of their physical and mental labour can never turn against them and dominate them. Socialism is the rule of man over himself; he will no longer be ruled by the material forces that he creates. The "species-specific" character of labour as free, spontaneous, and self-directed activity will be restored. "In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (Selected Works, 1, 1969, 127).

In socialism, labour-power will cease to be a commodity that is bought and sold; the sale of labour-power will be abolished; all production will be geared to use-value, not exchange value. What is produced, how it is produced and how much is produced will be determined by social needs, and not by profit motive. Under such a system there will be no scope for exploitation of any kind. This does not mean that the worker will be directly remunerated for all his labour in the form of wages; part of the value he creates will have to be set aside for common needs, such as the support of those who create no value, but perform socially necessary functions; the care of those who are unfit to work; collective consumption like schools, hospitals and infrastructure; and the renewal and expansion of the productive systems. Directly or indirectly all value created by workers will accrue to society in the collective satisfaction of social needs. This would require collective ownership and control of the means of production as well as socially planned cooperative production to meet the needs of society as a whole and of each individual. In the

*Critique of the Gotha Programme,* Marx says:

> In a higher phase of communist society, after enslaving subordination of individuals under division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour, from being a mere means of life, has itself become a prime necessity of life; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more freely – only then can the narrow horizon bourgeois rights be fully left behind and society inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs! (Selected Works, 3, 1970, 19)

Socialism will inaugurate the era of complete humanization. It marks the arrival of the Total Man. Marx insists that human fulfilment consists not only in the satisfaction of material needs. The abolition of material poverty alone, therefore, will not bring about socialism. Nor is it simply a question of redistributing the "income produced in the same old way." Unlike the animals, for man work is not simply an activity that produces the means of subsistence; it is his *life-activity,* a means of self-expression and self-realization. The species-specific character of human work as the power of self-expression and fulfilment will be restored in socialism. This would entail the abolition of division of labour, which stifled human creativity and self-expression by condemning the worker to stultifying one-sidedness. In *German Ideology* Marx and Engels portray communism as a society, " . . . where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner . . ." (Fromm 1963, 206).

Furthermore, work will regain its social character as a means of fellowship and interpersonal communion. Marx writes:

> In my production I would have objectified my individuality in its uniqueness . . . in your enjoyment or use of my product, I would have had the direct satisfaction of the awareness of having satisfied a human need through my work . . . I would have had the satisfaction of having acted as an intermediary between you and the human species . . . Our products would be so many mirrors from which our being would shine out to us . . ." (Quoted in Heilbroner 1980, 151).

The transition to socialism will be the result of a class struggle, in which the proletariat, the universal class, overthrows the bourgeoisie, the dominant class in capitalism. Although Marx and Engels suggest, especially in their early writings, that the class struggle would be a violent and bloody confrontation, they do not exclude the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism through the ballot box in countries where democracy is the form of government. [4]

When the proletariat seizes power, the classless society does not come into existence right away. First, there will be an intervening period of social transformation, which Marx

termed the *dictatorship of the proletariat* . During this transitional period, the ruling proletariat will dismantle, using force if necessary, the capitalist institutions, agencies, and mechanisms, and institute in their place socialist structures and processes. The dictatorship of the proletariat is a dictatorship only with regard to the bourgeoisie; for the proletariat it is a democracy. When its historical mission of laying the foundation of the socialist society is completed, the proletarian state will, in Engels' words, *wither away.* [5] According to Marx, the state is "the organized power of one class for oppressing another" (*Manifesto*). In a classless society, the political state, as a power opposed to the people, has no place; it will be abolished.

Marx repeatedly characterized his theory as *scientific socialism* in order to distinguish it form other socialist theories of his time, which he derided as *utopian socialism.* Nevertheless, the fact remains that the idyllic vision of the socialist society which Marx painted, too, is utopian in several respects, his protestations notwithstanding.

Marx was so consumed by his indignation for the evils of the status quo, that he give little thought to the possible perils of the post status quo which he envisaged. Marx failed to consider the possibility that under the system of collective ownership, controlled as it is by a single overarching agency, the workers might be exploited just as equally as they were in the capitalist system. "He overlooked the demonstrable truth that under socialism the degree of political democracy which prevails is of far greater importance than the degree of economic collectivism. For without democracy, a collectivized economy becomes at best a tool of benevolent despots and bureaucrats, and at worst, the most terrible instrument of oppression in the history of mankind" (Hook 1955, 44). His belief that a change in property relations will automatically eliminate all differences in power and prestige and every form of exploitation has turned out to be utopian.

The principle of socialism, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need," has great appeal as an ideal. However, the problems in translating this principle into practice are intractable. Needs are subjective, indefinite and potentially unlimited. What yardstick can one use to prioritize the varied needs of a multitude of individuals and groups in a large country? Even the notion of *basic needs* is historically and culturally conditioned. Similar difficulties of practical application surround the concept of *ability*, which is supposed to be the basis for determining the amount of work that would be expected from an individual in a communist society.

The socialist society which Marx envisaged is an extended family, a form of social organization in which relationships between individuals and groups will approximate the bonds that unite a loving family. Marx hoped that the spirit of an ideal family, where the needs of the members are gratified out of love rather than according to the principles of justice, could be extended to include

the whole society. But as Hook has observed: "The whole society can never become one family, not all families are free of conflict, and even in loving families love is not always enough" (1955, 45).

## II. Lessons for Socialism of the Furture

We have so far analysed the central notions of Marxist theory of history, where perhaps some of the answers for the failure of the socialist experiments are to be found. It seems clear that, if socialism has to have a future, it has to be profoundly transformed. The socialism of the future has several lessons to learn from its past. It is to these lessons for the future that we now turn.

### 1. From Dogma to Science

Marx came on the scene as the self-styled theoretician of "scientific" socialism. His brand of socialism, Marx insisted, is a science unlike that of the utopian socialists, which he scoffed at as nothing but a "pious hope". Yet, despite repeated claims to scientific status, over the years Marxism came to be regarded as an infallible dogma, intolerant of dissent and criticism. Marxist orthodoxy persecuted critics and dissenters in a manner reminiscent of the way religious orthodoxies dealt with heretics. Socialism of the future must rediscover its original purpose of providing a scientific analysis of social evolution, an analysis that subjects itself to ongoing criticism and revision. For, as Kappen points out " . . . revisionism is not an aberration, but the only guarantee of true historical praxis" (1992, 32). Socialism must take advantage of its disintegration and revitalize itself. It must unpack the inherited ideology, reject the received wisdom of antediluvian verities, and reconstitute itself by incorporating insights from historical experience.

### 2. From Class Struggle to People's struggle

Marx viewed proletarian class struggle as the instrument of transition from capitalism to socialism. The socialist hope that the workers of the world will unite as one class, aware of its interests, conscious of its destiny and committed to the cause of building a new society, has been belied by history. The *Manifesto's* clarion call, "Working men of all countries unite," has fallen on deaf years. The expected polarisation of the world into two opposing camps never materialized. Other loyalties of family, caste, race, religion, nationality, etc. effectively prevented the crystallisation of working class solidarity.

Today there is hardly any doubt that class struggle can play only a limited role in the construction of the future society. The socialism of the future must take into account other struggles too, which are based on caste, race, ethnicity, sex, religion, and nationality. Such struggles have their own autonomy and dynamics, and cannot be reduced to class struggle. The society of the future will be shaped by the combined impact of the struggles for emancipation of different groups like women, Dalits, Blacks, Tribals, and indigenous populations. Socialism cannot remain

a prisoner of the concept of class struggle. The socialist agenda must encompass people's struggles of every kind. The notion of proletarian revolution must be replaced by the concept people's revolution (Kappen1992; Danenberg 1993).

## 3. Participatory Democracy

Writing on the death centenary of Marx, V. M Tarkunde, one of the best known communists in India, bemoaned: "Marx himself was a passionate lover of freedom. Yet the philosophy founded by him has led to the negation of freedom in different parts of the world" (1983, 1). It is one of ironies of history that socialism, which Marx extolled as the "perfection of democracy" and "man's leap into freedom," gave rise to totalitarian regimes of the worst kind.

Against this background, the role of the party as an agent of revolution need to be reassessed. "The Soviet experience proves that no party can accomplish revolution for the masses. Were a party to undertake the task, revolution *for the masses* will invariably turn out to be a revolution *for the party*" (Kappen 1992, 36). The party claimed to exercise power on behalf of the proletariat. But in the absence of inner-party democracy and accountability of the leadership to the people, the vaunted dictatorship *of* the proletariat easily degenerated into a dictatorship *over* the proletariat. The socialism of the future must take corrective steps to avert the subversion of human rights by the party and the state apparatus under the guise of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It must find a way of combining political freedom with economic emancipation (Karat 1990).

## 4. Decentralization of the Economy

In the absence of clear guidelines from Marx about how to build the socialist economy, socialism came to be associated with state ownership of the means of production. Marxian concept of social ownership was distorted to mean state ownership. And when political and economic power came to be vested in the same hands, it gave rise to a new power elite no less exploitative than the propertied classes. The state ownership of the means of production resulted in new forms of estrangement between the unseen owners of the property and the workers who made use of it but who had no powers of ownership and little say in management (Kurien 1993). The socialism of the future must decentralize the economy and bring the means of production under the control of the people. Democratization in the sphere of production would involve the transfer of ownership, planning and management of production from the State to the cooperatives at the local level. Only then, will Marx's dream of a society " . . . in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (*Manifesto*) will become a reality,

## 5. Critique of Science and Technology

A child of the scientism of the 19th century, Marx adopted a soteriological view of science and technology. He was an admirer of the nature-conquering mega-technology, which he believed

will provide solutions to all the problems of humanity and usher in a new era of peace and prosperity. It is hardly surprising that his analysis offered no critique of the productive forces, especially science and technology. Instead, he advocated large-scale industrialism as the economic strategy of the socialist society. Large-scale industries, he believed, would increase the productivity of labour and at the same time ensure the social character of production (Ghosh 1990).

Socialism, with its triumphalist view of science and technology, nature-conquering ethos and mindless promotion of large-scale industrialism, has been no less responsible for the ecological disaster that threatens the world today. The socialism of the future must provide a critique not only of capitalism but of modernity as well, especially of the ecological problems caused by the injudicious use of science and technology in production. Mahatma Gandhi's trenchant critique of modernity, notably his call to eschew the cult of technology-driven mega-industrialism and to return to small-scale production that is in harmony with nature, must find an echo in the hearts of the socialists of the future.

## 6. Need for an Ethic

"Socialism's profoundest failure was its inability to craft the Socialist Man" (Mitra 1998, 13). The Socialist Man, whom Marx describes in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, is a *"social being"* who has overcome the conflict between man and nature, man and man, and man and the species. This view of human nature is the basis of Marx's sanguine optimism about the socialist society. Marx believed that the socialist man, with spirit of genuine altruism born of a community consciousness, would emerge spontaneously once the new economic formations of the socialist society have been put in place. This was perhaps the most fatal miscalculation of Marx. The socialist society arrived without the socialist man. The faith that political revolutions will automatically bring about revolution of consciousness was proven to be false.

True socialism requires a conversion of heart on a massive scale. This is hard to achieve without an ethics of selfless love. But, "(I)n the entire theses of Marx there is no place for anything like ethics . . . Marxism is a variety of atheism without ethics. Marx deliberately bypassed ethic, without giving any thought to the possible consequences of this omission . . . In discussing this crisis I would say that all the consequences are contained in the total negation of the cognitive and creative role of love in Marxian epistemology" (Nagarajan 1990, 39). Since the Marxist orthodoxy maintained that consciousness is itself is a product of the material conditions of existence, all efforts were focussed on the transformation of economic structures; no importance was attached to psychic-cultural transformations that would sublimate man's overly materialistic acquisitive instinct with a superordinating ethical imperative of love and selfless service. As Ghosh observes:

> Without a place for it (love), the communist movement came to be domi-

nated more by hatred for the propertied classes than by love for, and the preparedness to share the lives of, working people. Whereas a Gandhian or a Catholic sister of Charity, inspired by a deep love for the sufferers, tends to share their lives amid squalor, most communists of the present generation quieten their conscience by merely clenching their fists to expropriate the vested interests. When you omit love as a trait to be cultivated, fights even between comrades can break out on the slightest pretext. When hatred against the rich becomes the dominant passion, this hatred, with all its negativism, becomes internalised. It is not surprising, therefore, that Marxism failed to give birth to a humane society. That Marx himself was a very humane person is a different matter" (1990, 32).

Mao Tze-dung realized this lopsidedness of Marxism. That is why he issued the following instruction to the comrades: "love the cadres, love the people, serve the people and struggle against self" (see Nagarajan 1990, 39). Mao, who was a product of Marxism and Taoism, could not have failed to see the affinity between the socialist psyche and the disposition of the Tao, who, in the words of the Chinese Taoist saint Ch'an Ch'un, "procreates without possession, works without holding, and promotes without commanding" (Nagarajan 1990, 41). Class action alone, without a concomitant cultural revolution that transforms people's lifestyle and outlook on life, cannot establish a truly socialist society .

## Conclusion

No secular thinker in our age has aroused such passion as Karl Marx. The fervour of his analysis, the vehemence of his indictments, and the apocalyptic grandeur of his constructions are perhaps unparalleled in history. It is no wonder, then, that for nearly a century Marx's name polarised the hopes and hostilities of humankind. His analysis of social dynamics, even his detractors would admit, contained some profound insights, which have radically changed once and for all the way we understand social reality and human existence.

However, as the forgoing analysis shows, Marx's grand theoretical synthesis, when taken as whole, seems to be logically and empirically untenable. Marx will be remembered not so much as a great theoretician of history as a prophet of a brave and bright new world.

Today, with socialism in crisis, the dream of a better future for the underprivileged and the marginalised appears more distant than ever. Yet, the current crisis in socialism is also a reason for hope for those who, like this writer, cherished the socialist ideals, but abhorred their distortions in the so-called socialist societies. For it offers an opportunity to the band of sincere socialists all over the world to correct the deformations that beset socialism in the past, and to reconstitute it as an ideology of hope for those who dream of a new humanity.

## Notes

1. For a detailed analysis of the concept of alienation see Eric Fromm (1963, 43-57) and Richard Schacht (1971, 65-114).
2. For a discussion of concentration, centralization, falling rate of profit, and the increasing misery of the masses, see Bober (1965, 203-231).
3. This concept has been interpreted to mean different things: absolute physical impoverishment, relative physical impoverishment vis-a-vis the capitalist's growing income, or absolute spiritual and psychological impoverishment. For a discussion of its various meanings, see Bober (1965, 213 - 221)
4. For a discussion of Marx's views on the role of violence in class struggle, see Bober (1965, 261-268).
5. See Mendel (1965: 111-120) for an analysis of the concept of the *withering away* of the state.

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