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Scientization Bolshevik Style

(Philosophy, Science, and Ideology)

The topic of our discussion is extremely complex by virtue of the diversity of problems it covers, their contradictions, and their many layers. An objective analysis is complicated by the fact that we are "by origin from there," that we were all drawn into the process, and that it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to distance ourselves from this fact. Being involved in what happened is, on the one hand, a positive factor: it gives access to occurring events through a knowledge of facts and details that is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain for an investigator of the events many years later. But such involvement not only discloses the truth, it also creates the illusion that one possesses the truth, because a participant in events often makes his personal beliefs about them the basis of theoretical generalizations. A participant and a witness are very different categories in terms of their objective relation to actual facts.

Of course, these reflections do not mean that events are absolutely concealed from those participating in them. The problem is to distinguish a scientific objective analysis that takes into account not only the text but also the context as well as the subtext of events.

When we try to grasp conceptually the distinctive features of the way philosophical thought functioned in our country, we encounter ambiguities, categorial vagueness, and fuzziness in many concepts, including

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 "Stsientizatsiia po-bol'shevistski (filosofiia, nauka i ideologiia)," *Voprosy filosofii*, 1997, no. 11, pp. 29–33.

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the interpretative ones. Our generalizations and evaluations of the events in the field under analysis depend largely on our understanding of what at the time was taken as philosophy, Marxism, ideology, and so forth. We must bear in mind that for seven decades no one had a clear idea of the subject and the limits of what was officially designated as dialectical materialism. Many of the propositions constituting the core of this doctrine; specifically, that the world is physical and constantly developing, that matter is infinite and inexhaustible and its development is governed by a definite law, and so forth, are also a part of many other philosophical systems. These propositions admit of a multitude of different interpretations. In this regard, on the level of general concepts, dialectical materialism in its deideologized form is no better and no worse than many other philosophical systems. Hence, L. Graham is right when he argues that "if dialectical materialism were allowed to develop freely in the USSR, it would no doubt evolve in a direction consistent with the common assumptions of a broad nonmechanistic, nonreductive materialism."[1] It is sufficient to compare M.B. Mitin's and P.N Fedoseev's versions of Marxist philosophical thought with the works of such philosophers as P.V. Kopnin, E.V. Il'enkov, and M.K. Mamardashvili, not to mention the numerous representatives of the philosophy of science, to understand that it is not at all Marx's philosophy that is to blame, but rather the total ideologization of society and thought in which philosophy was included by force.

V.F. Pustarnakov's view that it would have been better for the future of philosophical thought in our country had the mechanists, not the dialecticians, won in the famous discussion of the 1920s and 1930s and that the model of philosophy professed by the mechanists was much closer to the ideas of the founders of Marxism than the model of the dialecticians does not seem quite convincing to me. The victory of the Deborin school was temporary; it lasted only about a year. It was a Pyrrhic victory because a year later this philosophical school, which was supposedly victorious, was no longer around. Hence, to say that the dialectical tradition of the dialecticians, going back to Hegel, became the basis of the activities of the pro-Stalinist philosophers and that Stalin was guided in his doings by any kind of philosophical dogmas is contestable, to say the least.

Philosophical life in the Soviet Union was primarily scientistic with a Russian accent. This scientization in the Bolshevik manner was sociopolitically conditioned. The growing power struggle led to the

pragmatico-instrumental interpretation of all processes that were taking place in the country, including the processes in philosophy. Science became the method of the conscious or unconscious instrumentalization of all the forms of intellectual and practical mastery of the world. Philosophy in itself can give various answers to one and the same question and, therefore, cannot serve as a reliable guideline to action. But science presupposes a single answer, the truth of which must be beyond doubt. Hence, only a scientific philosophy can serve as a guide.

This is the basis for S.K. Minin's position that "the term 'the philosophy of Marxism' is, first, contrary to logic, second, dangerous and harmful and, third, if it is not dangerous, it is superfluous and, for that reason alone, harmful." This leads to the conclusion that the new society "needs science, only science, and simply science."[2] An influential theoretician of the 1920s such as A.A. Bogdanov based a similar position on tectological arguments, claiming that "science will make philosophy unnecessary, just as religion is no longer necessary now."[3]

Although many rejected such philosophical nihilism, the scientization of the intellectual and ideological sphere of society in the Bolshevik style gradually took place. The result was "scientific ideology," "scientific philosophy," a "scientific worldview," "scientific atheism," and so forth. This scientization was of fundamental significance: not only did it disregarded the distinctive natures of world views, ideology, and philosophy, but also, under conditions of increasingly rigorous thought control, it turned science itself into an object of ideological manipulation that was to be adapted to the level of those who "called the tune." That is why "scientization Soviet style" differed from traditional scientization in the West. We may recall here that the educational level in Russia was not very high at the time and this was reflected in the interpretation of the achievements in the realms of science and philosophy. The debates on philosophy that unfolded among broad layers of the intelligentsia after the revolution could not have been very deep or productive, since the intellectual level of the majority of the participants was low. For instance, according to 1922 data, from 50 to 90 percent of the communists in party organizations were scarcely literate. Under such conditions, the simplifying phenomena such as "enchmenism" and the attempts to "dialecticize" mining, and so forth, were natural.

All of this shows once again that the boundaries of the subject of Marxist philosophy were vague and that various interpretations of it were possible. Furthermore, in my view, the founders of Marxism them-

selves were in a certain sense scientistically inclined thinkers. But that is another matter. I want to point out that not all the disciples of Deborin underestimated the new achievements of science and that the ranks of the dialecticians included specialists in the philosophy of science. It is enough to mention B.M. Gessen and A.I. Agol in this connection. Hence, to say that the mechanists were oriented towards science, while Deborin and his supporters placed their hopes on the philosophy of Plekhanov and Hegel is to miss the main point in their dispute. It seems to me that there were no winners in that discussion. Thought and philosophy suffered a defeat. The victory of the dialecticians was purely symbolic, since a few months after the formal end of the discussion with the mechanists the position of the dialecticians came under harsh criticism, which ended with the label of "Menshevizing idealism."

The headings of a few reviews published in the second issue of the journal *Books and the Proletarian Revolution* [Kniga i proletarskaia revoliutsiia] in 1932 testify about the ideological assessment of all the processes taking place in the country, including those in philosophy and science: "Against Reactionary Theories on the Military Science Front" [Protiv reaktsionnykh teorii na voenno-nauchnom fronte] (about Professor Svetin's book *A Critique of Strategic and Military History Views* [Kritika strategicheskikh i voenno- istoricheskikh vzglaidov] (Moscow/ Leningrad, 1931), "Bourgeois Reaction under the Mask of 'Marxist Linguistics' " [Burzhuaznaia reaktsiia pod maskoi "marksistskogo iazykoznaniia"] (on E. Polivanov's book *For a Marxist Linguistics*" [Za marksistskoe iazykoznanie] [Moscow, 1931]), "A Bourgeois Sortie" [Burzhuaznaia vylazka] (on O. Forsh's book *Ship of Fools* [Sumashedshii korabl']), and so on. This style was extended to scientific publications as well. The atmosphere of the time was reflected most vividly in the writings of E. Kol'man, particularly in his article "Wrecking in Science" [Vreditel'stvo v nauke], in which he argued that "the substitution of liberalism for the Bolshevik policy in science and the struggle for the partisanship of science is all the more criminal in that the bearers of the reactionary theories are reputable professors such as the Machist Frankel' in physics and the vitalists Gurvich and Berg in biology, and that Savich in psychology, Kol'tsov in eugenics, Vernadskii in geology, and Egorov and Bogomolov in mathematics 'infer,' each from his own science, the most reactionary social theories."[4]

The extracts cited, which could be multiplied, confirm the thesis of the suppression of philosophy from the 1930s to the 1950s. Under such

conditions, thought was forced to assume other forms, to surround itself with numerous quotations, and to withdraw into the peripheral, concrete areas of knowledge. But—and I want to emphasize this particularly—even in these extremely complex conditions, there were philosophers who were working on urgent philosophico-methodological problems of the developing natural sciences. Of course, there were only a few of them, but there were some. Let me give a few examples.

In 1931, the Second International Congress of the History of Science and Technology convened in London. B.M. Gessen, who had a decisive influence on the development of the externalist model in the theory of science, presented a paper on "The Socioeconomic Norms of Newton's Mechanics" [Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie normy mekhaniki Niutona]. The noted English philosopher of science G. Price wrote about the presentation: "The main event at the congress was,no doubt, the considerable contribution of the Soviet delegation and, particularly, Gessen's paper, in which he used all the power of the dialectical method to analyze Newton's world."[5] Gessen wrote a number of interesting works on the philosophical problems of the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics.

I should also mention the works of S.F. Vasil'ev on the methodological problems of nonclassical physics and the history of science. A number of his works were published in the little-known and strictly academic journal titled *The Archive of the History of Science and Technology* [Arkhiv istorii nauki i tekhniki], which later ended up in the special depository and, as a result, was hardly known even by specialists. But Vasil'ev was one of the first researchers to analyze many fundamental philosophico-methodological problems of quantum mechanics; in particular, he was the author of one of the first conceptual analyses of the methodological status, limits, and heuristic potential of the principles of correspondence, complementarity, and observability.

The research of the philosophers Gessen, Vasil'ev, and S.Iu. Semkovskii contributed to the conceptual sophistication of the treatment of reality, causality, space, time, and law. During this extremely difficult period in the country's development, leading scientists, especially physicists who enjoyed a peculiar immunity owing to their connection with practice (defense topics), defended the new nonclassical physics against the ideological-ignorant and dangerous criticism of A.A. Maksimov, V.E. L'vov, and others. This defense presupposed the development of the categorial system of the new

physics and, naturally, an ascent into the sphere of the philosophy and methodology of science. In this respect, the work of A.F. Ioffe, S.I. Vavilov, and V.A. Fok on the philosophical problems of nonclassical science were of fundamental significance. Thus, in the 1930s, Vavilov analyzed the heuristic and methodological potential of the method of mathematical hypothesis in his book *The Old and the New Physics* [Staraia i novaia fizika, 1933]. At the same time, Fok devoted attention to the philosophical analysis of the primitive concepts of quantum mechanics, investigated the interrelation of the physical and the mathematical in quantum mechanics, explicated the physical sense of Schroedinger's wave function, and demonstrated the necessity of changing the content of the concepts of trajectory, impulse, and state of a system in the light of the fundamental nature of the indeterminacy principle in the new quantum mechanics. Assuming the fundamental unity of the new physics and philosophy, Fok devoted considerable attention to the clarification of the philosophico-methodological content of nonclassical physics, the special interrelation between the subject and object in quantum mechanics, the subject matter of the new theory, and the status of the principle of complementarity. The latter was especially timely in view of the fact that many physicists, while accepting the new quantum mechanical ideas, denied the fundamental significance of N. Bohr's principle of complementarity. F.M. Gal'perin and M.A. Markov showed that, in the new realm of quantum mechanics, it is not the principle of causality, but the demands placed on causality, that are meaningless and attempted to give a noncontradictory interpretation of the principle of uncontrollable interaction. These ideas were later developed in Markov's famous article "On the Nature of Physical Knowledge" [O prirode fizicheskogo znaniia], published in *Voprosy filosofii,* no. 2 for 1947.

V.I. Vernadskii devoted his energy to the conceptual articulation of the laws of development of the biosphere, the interrelation between spirit and nature, and the distinctive functions of consciousness and life. His research yielded important results for the problems of time, the unity of the empirical and the theoretical, the laws of the development of science, and the status of philosophy and religion in culture. Vernadskii's idea of the emergence of the noosphere from the biosphere and his notion of the social responsibility of the scientist are particularly important in the present ecological and global crises. The recognition of the growing role of science in society led Vernadskii to a systematic study

of the problem of morality and science and of the methodological problems of the history of science. His holistic approach to science enable him to predict (in 1922) the danger of the military application of atomic energy. Unfortunately, because of ideological and political reasons, his ideas did not receive at the time the recognition they deserved in the intellectual life of our country.

At the end of the 1950s and especially in the 1960s, there was a considerable expansion of the problematic field of philosophy, particularly, of the philosophy of science. A new period in the development of the philosophical problems of physics was begun. This was reflected officially at the First All-Union Conference on the Philosophical Problems of Natural Science. In other words, a new period in the interrelation between science and the regime was launched. The regime began to realize how dangerous the struggle against science, particularly the natural sciences, can be.

Finally, what has happened in Russian philosophical life in the past decades, in my opinion, cannot be reduced to any one of the Ps mentioned by A.I. Volodin in his paper. It was one thing and the other—a bit more of one thing and a bit less of the other. And yet, if today we recognize the works of the neo-positivists such as R. Carnap, H. Reichenbach, and T. Kuhn to be a part of world philosophy, then it is unfair to question the contribution of Soviet scholars and thinkers who worked within a differenct philosophical paradigm on analogous problems such as the origin of scientific knowledge, its structure, and logic of functioning and on many other important questions of the philosophy and methodology of science.

Notes

1. L.R. Grekhem, *Estestvoznanie, filosofiia i nauki o chelovecheskom povedenii v Sovetskom Soiuze* (Moscow, 1991), p. 15.
2. *Pod znamenem marksizma*, 1922, nos. 11–12, pp. 194, 195.
3. *Sotsializm nauki* (Moscow, 1918), p. 5.
4. *Bol'shevik*, 1931, no. 2, p. 78.
5. D. Prais, *Nauka o nauke* (Moscow, 1966), p. 247.