

MARXISM FOR TODAY

Revolutions Are Not "Made"

By HAIM KANTOROVITCH

VIII

For the task of creating proletarian Socialism, Marx and Engels were both well prepared. They had gone through the Hegelian school, where they had learned to abhor all eternal and ultimate truths upon which Utopian Socialism rested. From Hegel they learned that "truth . . . was no longer . . . a collection of ready dogmatic statements which, once discovered, must only be thoroughly learned. Truth lay now in the process of knowledge itself."

The Hegelian dialectic, which Marx and Engels made their own, precluded all possibility of Utopianism. "From this point of view the history of mankind no longer appeared as a wild whirl of senseless deeds of violence; all equally condemnable at the judgment seat of mature philosophical reason and which are best forgotten as quickly as possible, but as the process of evolution of man himself."

History Decided

But not only from Hegel did the founders of modern socialism learn to distrust all such fine words as eternal reason, true justice, ultimate truths. History itself disproved them. A study of history revealed to Marx and Engels the fact that behind all these high sounding words were hidden the material, economic interests of some class in society. The ideological forerunners of the French revolution believed that they fought for abstract principles of truth, reason, equality, etc. But what were the actual results of their struggle to enthrone reason?

"We know today," Engels says "that this kingdom of reason was nothing more than the idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisie; that the eternal right found its realization in bourgeois justice; that this equality reduced itself to bourgeois equality before the law; that bourgeois property was proclaimed as one of the essential rights of man; and that the government of reason, the Contract Social of Rousseau came into be-

ing and only could come as a democratic bourgeois republic. The great thinkers of the eighteenth century could, no more than their predecessors, go beyond the limits imposed upon them by their epoch."

More Than Criticism

The criticism of capitalism is doubtless a necessary thing and there is no lack of it in Utopian Socialist literature.

But this is not enough. Drawing pictures of the future society may be good propaganda, but propaganda is only of value where it arises out of and can appeal to some real interest of some social class. The drawing of blue prints for revolutions may be a fine pastime for those who have nothing else to do, but these are not the things that make or unmake social orders.

"Great historical movements," says Marx, "have been always determined by mass-interests, and only in so far as they represented these interests could the idea prevail in these movements. Otherwise the ideas might indeed stir up enthusiasm but they could not achieve any results."

To put socialism on a realistic basis it was necessary, not to invent new ideas but to find out whether there were objective forces in society leading to socialism, making it necessary and possible, and whether there were in society people in whose interest it is to fight it. In one of his earliest works, Marx, discussing the possibilities of a German revolution, declared that the revolution is possible, only "in the formation of a class in chains which finds itself in bourgeois society but is not of it."

This was not yet the Marxian theory of the class struggle, but it showed the direction in which Marx's thought was moving.

Who Make Revolutions?

Revolutions are not made by people who become enthusiastic over ideas. On the contrary only those people become enthusiastic about revolutionary ideas who are compelled by their material interests to make revolutions. Revo-

lutions, social changes, are not accidents and can not be made at will. Social evolution follows its own laws. Of course man makes his own history, but he makes it under given social and economic conditions, with "tools" offered to him by the whole former development of society, within the limits of social possibilities.

Marx, of course, never denied the power of ideas in society as some critics contend, but Marx knew that ideas do not fall ready-made from heaven, that ideas and ideals are themselves deeply rooted in the material conditions of life, that they appear and disappear with the appearance and disappearance of material conditions and material interests which they reflect. "The growing perception that existing social institutions are unreasonable and unjust, that reason has become unreasonable, and right wrong, is only proof that changes in the modes of production and exchange have silently taken place with which the social order, adapted to earlier economic conditions, is no longer in keeping."

Social Thinking

The material interests which are behind human behavior, as well as human thinking, are rooted in the modes of production and exchange.

"In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production."

It is in the development and change in the modes of production that the key to the history of ideas can be found. The Utopian Socialists did not understand this. They were themselves no "happy incidents" but results of the development of changes in the social mode of production. They reflected the economic situation of their time. That the Socialist ideas and theories were so primitive and crude was simply due to the crude state of development of the capitalism of their time.