

# Dialectical Materialism

*by Ray Nunes (Chairman of the former Workers Party in the 1990s)*

## **Note by Author**

The study of the Marxist theory of development, dialectical materialism, is essential to the building of a Marxist-Leninist party and hence for a solidly-grounded revolutionary movement. This essay on the subject forms part of an introductory study course on Marxist-Leninist theory. It was originally prepared in the late 1980s as part of a study course for a group interested in Marxism and in forming a new political party of the working class. That was achieved, and it exists now as the Workers Party of New Zealand. The nature of the material studied, i.e., philosophy, is more abstract than the other subjects in the course, and therefore presenting it in popular form as far as is possible, requires extra time in exposition. That is one reason for the greater length of this essay as compared to the previous studies. But there are additional reasons which need explanation.

(1) There are important questions relating to the laws of dialectics and their application that arose during and since the ideological struggle of the 1960s against modern revisionism, relating to Stalin's pamphlet *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* and also to Mao Tse-tung's essays on philosophy, particularly *On Contradiction* and *On Practice*.

To seek the best exposition that would aid both the beginner in Marxist philosophy and the more experienced student of the subject, the author found it necessary to compare the basic philosophical writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao from the point of view of establishing a correct Marxist-Leninist standpoint. This naturally made for lengthy treatment. It became apparent that (a) Stalin had made errors that resulted in shortcomings in his leadership; and (b) Mao had overall made important positive developments to philosophy and had a much deeper understanding of it, than Stalin.

(2) The question of how to utilise revolutionary dialectics in the practical work of a Marxist-Leninist party and indeed of the individual party member

is dealt with much more fully and explicitly by Mao than by any other, even by Lenin, although Mao clearly has studied Lenin and drawn important lessons from him. This too, demanded extra space.

(3) Because it is now extremely difficult to obtain copies of Mao's two basic pamphlets *On Contradiction* and *On Practice* the author felt it necessary to include certain essentials of these pamphlets to enable their use in practice.

(4) Little space is devoted to Enver Hoxha's crude attacks on Mao as a philosopher. This is reserved for a later study and in order not to make an already long essay longer by rebutting here the stupidities and distortions to which Hoxha descends.

### **The Basic Question of Philosophy**

Dialectical materialism is the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism. Not only is it the sole outlook which gives a scientifically-based understanding of the world around us; it also enables us to understand what brings about changes in that world - including human society and in people's thoughts about it. That is the first important thing to note. The second important thing is that a proper understanding of dialectical materialism can enable a workers' political party to guide its practical work correctly in the process of changing the world. We shall deal with these two aspects in order.

Philosophy - the study of the development of human thinking about the natural world and man's place in it - has a fairly long history. But in the middle of the nineteenth century it underwent a revolution at the hands of the two great thinkers and founders of scientific socialism, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Engels wrote an account of the development of their philosophy in his pamphlet: *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. (The word 'end' is used in the sense of 'outcome'.) He writes:

The great basic question of all philosophy, especially of more recent philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being? The question of the position of thinking in relation to being, a question which by the way, had played a great part also in the scholasticism of the Middle Ages, the question: which is primary, spirit or nature - that question, in relation to the church, was sharpened into this: Did God create the world or

has the world been in existence eternally? The answers which the philosophers gave to this question split them into two great camps. Those who asserted the primacy of spirit to nature and therefore, in the last instance, assumed world creation in some form or other - and among the philosophers, Hegel, for example, this creation often becomes still more intricate and impossible than in Christianity - comprised the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded nature as primary, belong to the various schools of materialism

These two expressions, idealism and materialism, originally signify nothing else but this ? (1)

Most of the earlier Greek philosophers were materialists in their outlook. Important contributions to materialism were also made by English philosophers, particularly Francis Bacon, John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, to which group Marx gave the credit of being the fathers of modern materialism. The French materialists of the eighteenth century were much influenced by the British school. In the sphere of ideas they helped to prepare the ground for the great French Revolution of 1789-93. Each of these schools was opposed by philosophical idealists, particularly (but not only) by theologians, advocates of religion. So it is today with Marxism.

Up to the mid-nineteenth century the religious - and most of the secular - authorities propagated the idea that the bible, both the old and the new testaments, were the founts of all knowledge. The age of the earth was held to be about six thousand years. The nature of the wider universe was unknown. Today an immense array of factual evidence has been accumulated by the physical sciences - particularly astronomy, geology, palaeontology, chemistry and physics, conclusively proving that the age of the earth is in the vicinity of 4.5 thousand million years, while the age of the universe is approximately 15 thousand million years. Our own solar system with its sun and planets is a tiny part of the Milky Way galaxy, with its two hundred billion stars, and there are at least two billion galaxies in the cosmos, many much vaster than our own. The simplest forms of life on earth originated about three billion years ago, evolving eventually into modern man (homo sapiens) somewhere between one hundred thousand and forty thousand years ago, a mere trifle in geological time.

Modern man, homo sapiens, is himself descended from ancestral species known as hominids. Nowadays, anthropology can trace earlier types of erect-walking beings back several million years, with an evolutionary history which includes a number of increasingly skilled tool-making-and-using hominid species.\*Contemporary scientific data such as the above provides the modern, natural-scientific basis for materialism and for affirming the primacy of matter in relation to mind.

Thought that does not originate from a brain cannot and does not exist. Thought is a product of thinking beings, but the world existed billions of years before such beings evolved. Matter is primary; thought, consciousness secondary. That is the basic philosophical standpoint of Marxism-Leninism today, as developed by Marx and Engels, reinforced by a century of scientific advance

While Marx and Engels did not have all the modern discoveries of science to draw on, many vital scientific discoveries did take place in the nineteenth century which underpinned their philosophical materialism. Engels mentions particularly the discovery of the mechanical equivalent of heat (Mayer and Joule); the law of the conservation of energy (which should be called the law of the transformation of energy); the nature of the cell as the basis of biological development (Virchow); and the epoch-making establishment of evolutionary science by Darwin.

In Germany, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries produced an outcrop of important thinkers who established the German school of classical philosophy. Some (Kant, e.g.) were a mixture of materialism and idealism. Others were idealists out to refute materialism. One of these, however, Georg Hegel, while his philosophical system was idealist, became the first in modern times to develop his philosophy on the basis of the dialectical method. In a preface to his great work *Capital*, Marx wrote:

The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell. (2)

Marx and Engels came up, as it were, through the school of classical German philosophy, and at first became adherents of Hegel. However, Hegel's idealism was subjected to severe criticism by Ludwig Feuerbach from the point of view of materialism. Immediately Marx and Engels became 'Feuerbachians'; that is, they answered the basic question of philosophy by affirming that nature, matter, was primary and thought, consciousness, was secondary. But they went much further than Feuerbach, whose outlook lacked consistency. They united philosophical materialism with the dialectical method of Hegel, only with that method standing upon its feet, not upon its head, and revolutionised philosophy with the outlook of dialectical materialism.

### **Philosophical Materialism**

Most people know philosophical idealism in the form of religion. Of course there is an enormous variety of religions and sects. Nearly all have in common a belief in a creator, a god who made the world and everything in it. This view usually holds that the world was created before man and does not depend on man for its existence. This view is thus a form of objective idealism.

Subjective idealism, on the other hand, holds that the material world, nature, being, exist only in men's consciousness, that they are the product of our sensations or ideas. That is, if one ceases to observe them, they do not exist.

Materialism, on the other hand, considers that gods and their powers are man-made, as primitive forms of explanations of natural phenomena which were once mysteries because of man's lack of scientific knowledge, but are nowadays no longer. The many nature gods - thunder, wind, forests, rivers etc. gradually in the course of ages became refined and distilled into a single, omnipotent being. The religions, including Christianity, to which such gods belong are a distorting mirror, in which man, who created them, sees a one-sided reflection of the social life, beliefs and customs of peoples from which they sprang. Why, then, do they not disappear in the light of present-day scientific knowledge? Because the exploiting classes consciously use them as ideological weapons to convince the masses that the problems of this world - wars, starvation, poverty, oppression etc., are caused by a creator; that man is therefore powerless against them, and can only submit

and hope for a better life in another, though mythical, world after death. Without the immense support of the exploiters, rendered in a thousand different ways, gods and religion would quickly lose most of their followings. Religion is consciously used by the bourgeoisie as a form of opium to stupefy the masses and divert them from struggle for socialism.

Subjective idealism is another way of attacking materialism. Its chief spokesman was the English Bishop Berkeley, in the early eighteenth century. Its modern advocates have to disguise it, because, carried to its logical conclusion, by denying the objective existence of everything but one's own sensations, it reduces to the belief that only the speaker exists, a view known as solipsism and ridiculed as such. In a period of political reaction following the defeat of the 1905 Russian revolution, a trend of subjective idealism made its way into Marxism, pretending to be the latest thing in modern science, deriving as it did from the Austrian scientist Ernst Mach. Lenin defended Marxism from the would-be Machians in his book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Answering such people who claimed to have risen above the 'naive realism' of Marxist materialism, Lenin wrote:

The "naive realism" of any healthy person who has not been an inmate of a lunatic asylum or a pupil of the idealist philosophers consists in the view that things, the environment, the world, exist independently of our sensation, of our consciousness, of our Self and of man in general. (3)

In one way or another, even though it may disguise itself as positivism, a supposed 'philosophy of science', subjective idealism leads back to the idea of a creator. Thus, as Engels showed, there are two lines in philosophy, the line of materialism or the line of idealism. 'Are we to proceed from things to sensation and thought, or from thought and sensation to things?' (4)

## **Motion and Development**

Once Marx and Engels had, by intense intellectual labour, reached the luminous standpoint of dialectical materialism (and Engels acknowledges Marx's pre-eminence in this work) they applied it in all of their investigations, writings and practical activity such as the founding and leading of the First International, the 'International Working Men's Association'.

While recognising the great achievements of the eighteenth century French materialists, they pointed to the main shortcomings of this school. Lenin summarised their views as follows:

This [i.e., French] materialism was predominantly mechanical, failing to take account of the latest developments of chemistry and biology ? 2) the old materialism was non-historical, non-dialectical (metaphysical, in the sense of anti-dialectical), and did not adhere consistently and comprehensively to the standpoint of development; 3) it ? only interpreted the world, whereas the point is to change it; that is to say, it did not understand the importance of revolutionary, practical activity. (5)

'Mechanical' materialism arose in the form it did because at that time the science of mechanics was the first to come to any definite close. This view understood development in a 'mechanical' way, simply as increase or decrease in size or quantity, or as movement in a circle which simply repeated itself and came back to the same starting point. 'Not adhering to the standpoint of development' means that it did not conceive of, or try to explain, the changes of state that are a marked feature of actual development. Rather it saw the world as a vast machine whose parts, such as living things and also society, could only undergo changes in size and in due course, like the flywheel of an engine, would come back to begin the process again.

Not only the world, but the entire universe around us is a demonstration that objective reality is material. That is, all that exists outside of our heads, outside of the minds of people, is material. This is an integral part of the Marxist theory of knowledge, of how mankind acquires valid knowledge. There is a relationship between mind and matter, but it is one which only dialectical materialism can properly explain. Feuerbach first gave a materialist explanation which Marx and Engels agreed with fully. Engels summarises his view as follows:

The material, sensuously perceptible world to which we ourselves belong is the only reality ? Our consciousness and our thinking, however suprasensuous [above the senses. Author] they may seem, are the product of a material, bodily organ, the brain. Matter is not a product of mind, but mind itself is merely the highest product of matter. (6)

Beyond this, for historical reasons which Engels explains in the passage following, Feuerbach was unable to go. We will go into more detail on the Marxist theory of knowledge further on. It is sufficient to note here that the relationship of matter to mind, which the French materialists could not adequately explain, is understood more easily when we consider that matter can be approached from two sides; that of philosophy and that of the physical sciences. Here we are concerned mainly with the philosophical concept of matter, which can be defined as 'all that which exists outside of and independently of consciousness'. This is the fundamental materialist view of matter. The actual physical constitution of matter, its structure, the inter-relations of the atomic nucleus, the so-called elementary particles, positive and negative electricity, the interchangeability of particles with energy and radiation, are subjects for the physical sciences to study. Every day new discoveries in this field enlarge - and sometimes correct the scientific body of knowledge relating to it. But these discoveries do not alter the philosophical view, which considers the question 'what is matter?' within the framework of the specific relationship of matter and mind in the particular sphere of the theory of knowledge, epistemology. Nature, matter, is in a constant state of motion. Nothing is absolutely at rest, nor can it be. The real connection between matter and motion was unclear to former materialists. 'And yet', wrote Engels over a century ago, 'it is simple enough. Motion is the mode of existence of matter. Never anywhere has there been matter without motion, nor can there be.' (7)

Motion in this sense is not only mechanical motion in space (or space-time) but all forms of change and development, growth and decay. Matter is in constant motion wherever man looks, both in the world and in the cosmos. Within every atom, electrons are spinning and orbiting a central nucleus, and every object, however infinitesimal, is either a moving particle or made up of moving particles, which can also have a dual character as particle and wave. Our world spins on its axis, rotates around the sun, while the whole solar system rotates around the galaxy, which, in turn, is part of a larger system of galaxies, all moving in a general process of expansion of the universe. The physics and mechanics to which we have just been referring are but two of the many forms of the motion of matter. Each of the major sciences is, in fact, a study of a basic form of the motion of matter; chemistry, plant and animal biology are other forms, while a still more complex form exists in the development of society. It is not difficult to see that all living things are in a



state of growth or decay. It is more difficult to see things which appear quite stable undergoing change. A rock may seem to be quite unchanging. Nevertheless, it is being acted upon by sun, wind and rain (or condensation) which imperceptibly bring about changes. Thus it is that the earth itself has a history of billions of years in time, during which the rocks, land masses, and continents, seas, rivers, lakes and oceans, have all undergone countless changes and are still undergoing them. A lump of wood such as a table may keep its appearance for a long time but it, too, is subject to atmospheric and chemical changes which lead to its eventual decay.

Thus when we examine the world of nature we find that change and development are universal, even though with some things change seems so slow that they appear to be at rest. But this rest is only relative to certain times when these same things undergo rapid changes. There is nothing whatsoever in the universe that is at absolute rest.

There have been many attacks on philosophical materialism besides those which openly take the standpoint of religion or out-and-out idealism. Particularly, the question of the theory of knowledge is a focus of attack. There are those philosophers, among them Hume and Kant, and their more modern descendants, 'who question the possibility of any cognition or at least of an exhaustive cognition of the world? The most telling refutation of this, as of all other philosophical crotchets is practice, namely, experiment and industry,' (8.) writes Engels.

Kant introduced the concept of 'ungraspable' things-in-themselves, that is, that there are classes of things beyond the capacity and ability of man to know. Engels answers this objection with the materialist line: 'If we are able to prove the correctness of our conception of a natural process by making it ourselves, bringing it into being out of its conditions and making it serve our own purposes into the bargain, then there is an end to the Kantian ungraspable "thing-in-itself"'. (9) He cites the chemical extraction from coal tar of the colouring matter of the madder root, alizarin, as one of the many similar cases, of once 'ungraspable' things-in-themselves which overnight became 'things-for-us'. Of course, today there are thousands of substances existing in nature, whose chemical constituents - often very complex, as in the case of insulin - have been analysed and understood to the point of being synthesised by modern science and technology. There is nothing ungraspable now about many such processes which were in earlier times

apparently unfathomable mysteries. The materialist viewpoint is this: there is nothing which is unknowable; only things which are not known. The development of human knowledge is, in fact, a constant process of transition of things-in-themselves into things-for-us.

And indeed this is a central task of modern scientific, (i.e., Marxist-Leninist) epistemology, the explanation of the transition from ignorance to knowledge. For it is precisely this transition, this transformation, that is cognition. But there are things which can never be known to man, argued the founder of the philosophy of positivism, Auguste Comte, in the nineteenth century. Man can never know the composition of the stars, he claimed. Yet two years after his death in 1859 the spectroscope was invented and the chemical composition of the stars could be determined by the technique of spectral analysis, ever since a standard practice in astronomy.

There is another type of attack along a different line but with the same intent. This is the agnostic viewpoint represented by Hume and carried down to modern positivism.

Materialism holds that our senses give us reliable information on the objective world, that all our knowledge derives from information given to us by our sensations.

To this latter point the agnostic of Hume's tendency agrees. But then he questions whether our sensations can give us really accurate representations of objects. He denies that beyond the boundary of sensations there is anything certain. This is also the line of modern positivism of various shades. To the questions which the materialist answers: yes, we can know that either with our present level of knowledge or with further investigation, the positivist answers: we do not and cannot know the answer.

Engels' reply to this was;

From the moment we turn to our own use these objects, according to the qualities we perceive in them, we put to an infallible test the correctness or otherwise of our sense-perceptions. If these perceptions have been wrong, then our estimate of the use to which an object can be turned must also be wrong, and our attempt must fail. But if we succeed in accomplishing our aim, if we find that the object does agree with our idea of it, and does

answer the purpose we intended it for, then that is positive proof that our perceptions of it and of its qualities, so far, agree with reality outside ourselves. (10)

Engels called agnosticism 'shamefaced materialism'. The agnostic regards nature materialistically, but he adds that there is no way of knowing that there is or is not some sort of Supreme Being beyond the known universe. Even in Engels' time the scientific knowledge of the universe was such that there was no room for any creator, particularly one shut out from the existing universe. Today that scientific knowledge has been enormously extended, and the concept of an evolutionary universe is still more thoroughly and unquestionably established.

The materialistic view that our sense perceptions give us an accurate reflection of reality is fully borne out by all modern science.

The human brain is constituted of matter organised in a particular way. It is matter that thinks. It is the repository of the sensory connections of man with the external world, as a result of which a variety of mental activities takes place. The sum of these activities: sensation, perception, conception, thought, feeling and will, make up consciousness. In our consciousness the material world is reflected. Thus, consciousness is a property of the brain, a reflection of being. Without a brain, this definite form of organised matter, there can be no thought, no consciousness. Hence, in the relationship of matter to consciousness, nature to spirit, matter is unquestionably primary.

The conception that thought or consciousness can exist separately from the brain is the basis of the religious belief in the existence of a God, which holds that the material universe and all that it contains is simply a thought - or thoughts - in the mind or consciousness of an immaterial being. Of course, there is not the slightest tittle of evidence for such a belief. The only consciousness known to mankind is that which is a product of the brain. The more truly our consciousness reflects the material world, the more scientifically accurate is our knowledge of the latter.

In today's world reactionary idealists still attack materialism by smuggling into the theory of knowledge Humean agnosticism and the long-disproved Kantian ungraspable 'thing-in-itself' in new guises. Predominant among these is the 'uncertainty principle' of modern quantum mechanics. This holds

that the velocity and position of particles such as the electron or light photon cannot be measured simultaneously because the very act of utilising a measuring instrument such as a beam of light would alter one or the other.

Modern physics also recognises that such particles are actually twofold in character, appearing either as particle or wave according to the physical reaction taking place. Instead of recognising this 'unity and struggle of opposites' as a splendid example in nature of the fundamental correctness of dialectics, bourgeois philosophers immediately saw an opportunity of attacking materialism by asserting that the uncertainty principle proved wrong the dialectical materialist view that everything is knowable; there are only things that are not known. They assert the impossibility of knowing simultaneously the velocity and position of particles.

But the fact is that the wave-particle duality can be reproduced in the laboratory in scientific experiments. Moreover, using statistical methods, both the velocity and position of particles can be determined with sufficient accuracy to enable man to turn them to practical use, showing that they are not unknowable 'things-in-themselves'. The production of the electron tunnelling microscope which gives new possibilities of direct close-up study of atoms, makes use precisely of statistical methods of determining with great accuracy both the position and velocity of electrons; it is practical evidence that both these are knowable, though in a special statistical form based on probability.

## **Dialectics**

Historically speaking, Marx and Engels became philosophical materialists before they united the dialectical method with materialism to form the integral world outlook of dialectical materialism.

The world outlook of dialectical materialism incorporates materialist dialectics, a scientific theory of development.

All things and processes are in a state of development, even though this may not always be evident to the naked eye. To say a thing is developing is to say that it is changing - either growing or decaying (and usually these processes go on simultaneously, as in biology).

Human knowledge extends over three very broad fields: nature (the material world around us), society, and human thought. All of these are constantly in a state of development and change. Dialectics is unique in that it enables us to understand - and use - the general laws of change.

Any science only becomes established when, through continued observation, collection and comparison of facts concerning its subject matter, and close study of these facts, regularly recurring features and essential, inner connections are revealed and, after testing in practice, become known as the laws of this science.

So it is with dialectics, the study of motion, change and development. Engels defined dialectics as 'the science of the general laws of motion, both of the external world and of human thought - two sets of laws which are identical in substance but differ in their expression in so far as the human mind can apply them consciously, while in nature and also up to now [1888. Author] for the most part in human history, these laws assert themselves unconsciously, in the form of external necessity, in the midst of an endless series of accidents. (11)

The great value of materialist dialectics is that it enables us to understand things and processes in their actual movement and in their mutual interaction with other things around them. It teaches us to seek the basic cause of movement within things, and not outside them. It takes account not only of slow and gradual changes in things (evolutionary change) but also of sudden changes, leaps from one state to another (revolutionary change), and shows the connection between these two types of change. For instance, gradual decrease in the temperature of water leads to a point - nought degrees celsius - where a sudden change takes place to a new state, to a substance, ice, with quite different properties from those of water. Note that there is not a slow growth of an ever-thickening paste until the new substance, ice, is reached. What takes place is a leap to a new and different state. Similarly, gradual increase in the temperature of water leads to a sudden, not gradual, change at 100 degrees celsius to a new state, steam, again a substance with different properties from those of water. We will bring forward more examples (nature is full of them) as we deal further on with the laws of dialectics.

Dialectics differs essentially from formal logic in that it deals with things and processes as they are in the real world, in a state of motion and development, not static and unchanging.

'The great basic thought', writes Engels, that 'the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes, in which the things apparently stable no less than their mind images in our heads, the concepts, go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away ? this great fundamental thought has, especially since the time of Hegel, so thoroughly permeated ordinary consciousness that in this generality it is now scarcely ever contradicted'. (12)

In his biographical essay, Karl Marx, Lenin points out that Hegelian dialectics as the most comprehensive, the most rich in content, and the most profound doctrine of development, was regarded by Marx and Engels as the greatest achievement of classical German philosophy. He writes:

They considered every other formulation of the principle of development, of evolution, one-sided and poor in content, and distorting and mutilating the real course of development (which often proceeds by leaps, catastrophes and revolutions) in nature and society. (13)

While Hegel developed the doctrine of dialectical development and formulated laws of dialectics, he presented them as laws of the movement of thought, and then in an upside-down way. He asserted that the motion and development of nature and society in the real world, only comes about as the result, the materialisation moment by moment, of the development of an all-embracing idea, which he called the Absolute Idea. This of course, is pure idealism, the view that matter is created by thought. Where the Absolute Idea came from Hegel neglects to mention.

Unlike Hegel's, Marx's dialectics were materialist. Thus he writes in an Afterword to Capital: 'My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite.' (14)

Marx turned dialectics the right way up. He showed, in contrast to Hegel, that 1) the ideas of men arise from the material world around them, and 2)

that real development proceeds from changes in the material world to changes in people's ideas, and not vice-versa.

These materialist views correspond with the modern scientific understanding of the world. The material world existed long before men and consequently long before ideas, which are wholly a product of a material organ, the human brain.

Take for example the right to strike. Is it possible that such an idea could exist before there were people? The very notion is ludicrous. But further, a strike is the act of a group of wage workers who refuse to sell their labour power to a given employer at a given time. Such an act could not take place under slave society or feudalism because in those systems labour power was not commonly a commodity. The idea of the right to strike, therefore, can only come into existence on the basis of the material conditions of the wage workers under capitalism, the conditions of capitalist commodity production, where labour power is a commodity bought and sold on the market like any other, and where the workers, as the owners of this commodity, can withhold it from the market. Plainly, the material world gives rise to the idea and not vice-versa.

The word 'materialism' is often used by bourgeois parsons and the press to denote the possession of material goods, gluttony, self-indulgence etc., in order to discredit the philosophical outlook of materialism. But the 'gross' materialism invented by the parsons is the province of capital, of the wealthy bourgeoisie, and by no means that of the adherents of the philosophy of dialectical materialism, whose aim is the liberation of mankind precisely from bourgeois rule, from the ideology of self-interest and 'me first', which objectively is served by just those who denounce 'materialism' with such loud and only too often, hypocritical voices.

## **Metaphysics**

Materialist dialectics not only rejects all unscientific views on the relation of spirit to nature, of thinking to being. It also opposes the unscientific view that all things exist in separation from each other and are unchanging in all essentials. This outlook, called metaphysics, is part of the religious world view but is not limited to the church. French materialism was also metaphysical in its general outlook. Largely this was due to the limitations of

the eighteenth century. Science was still relatively undeveloped, still in the stage of collection and observation of data. 'But this method of work', says Engels, 'has also left us as legacy the habit of observing natural objects and processes in isolation, apart from their connection with the vast whole; of observing them in repose, not in motion ...' (15)

The metaphysical mode of thought is directly opposed to that of dialectics. Thus, it held that new varieties of plants and animals could not emerge as a result of natural development. Religion still generally propagates this view in respect of the emergence of man, despite the overwhelming scientific evidence for human evolution from the animal kingdom. This comes not only from the study of fossils, palaeontology, but also from the science of molecular biology, which shows that the genetic makeup of man is almost identical with that of the chimpanzee. (98 per cent so, according to an article in *Scientific American*, 1997). Under the title of 'creationism', religion tries to cover its anti-scientific, metaphysical outlook - that all things are created by God for eternity - with a scientific-sounding name.

The French philosopher, Robinet, (1735-1820) asserted that the adult person was the same as the embryo. The only difference was one of size. The embryo was supposed to contain in extreme miniature, all the various parts and organs of the fully grown organism, a metaphysical view of human biology.

Modern metaphysics considers development simply as quantitative increase or decrease, refuses to recognise leaps and sudden changes, and particularly the notion that the source of development in things is internal contradiction, which we will consider in more depth shortly. It is not surprising that the ruling class makes use of metaphysics in various ways, not only in the role of religion.

We find it in politics, in the role of reformism and revisionist advocacy of the gradual growing over of capitalism into socialism, the denial of the class struggle and the necessity of revolution. The Fabian Society in England (and after World War II in New Zealand) preached 'the inevitability of gradualism' in opposition to Marxism and in support of 'Labour' socialism, which meant in practice substituting class collaboration between workers and capitalists for class struggle between them, with the aim of making the workers simply an appendage of the capitalist class.



## The Laws of Dialectics

So far we have given a general outline of the main aspects of philosophical materialism and of its opposition to philosophical idealism. We have also considered dialectics as a doctrine of development in opposition to metaphysics.

When we come to the laws of dialectics which it is necessary to use in the practical work of changing society we find certain problems which can be confusing to those just coming to the subject. These concern certain differences in exposition, and also some errors, contained in, for instance, Stalin's views. It is necessary to try to elucidate these differences and solve the problem of who and what is correct.

First of all let us say that Marx and Engels, the founders of dialectical materialism, took over the three dialectical laws expounded by Hegel, utilised them in their work, and enlarged upon them from their materialist standpoint. These laws are stated in their classical form: 1) The law of the unity and struggle of opposites. 2) The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice-versa, and 3) The law of the negation of the negation.

Set out baldly in this way, these laws may appear rather strange and hard to grasp. However, as we come to examine them we shall find that they have real meaning and can be understood and used. As we earlier noted, they express in a general way certain features common to the process of development (or motion, or change.) We will give a brief outline of each law, with examples, and then return to them in a different setting, taking into account new and different formulations used by both Stalin and Mao, and consider the nature and relative importance of these.

**LAW I:** The law of the unity and struggle of opposites. (This can also be called the law of contradiction).

This means that all things or processes develop and change as a result of the struggle of opposites (opposing tendencies or forces) within them. Whether in nature, society or human thought, all things or processes contain such opposites, or contradictions, and each side or aspect of each contradiction, while mutually exclusive of its opposing side or aspect, is

interacting with or interdependent on the other. Thus they at the same time form a unity of opposites, inseparable from each other.

A magnet has a north and south pole, which interact with each other, and though we may cut that magnet into two, four, eight or more parts, north and south poles will remain. The positively-charged nucleus of an atom is in contradiction with the negatively-charged electrons which orbit it. In living things we see life and death in indissoluble unity, as the contradictory processes of assimilation and dissimilation proceed within every cell. In capitalist society we find a basic contradiction between capital and labour, the capitalist class and the working class. Capital cannot exist in separation from its opposite labour, as long as capitalism lasts, for it depends on class exploitation for its existence.

In the sphere of thought, we find a mental reflection of the contradictions in the objective world. This applies to the comprehension of both large and small phenomena, to the use of concepts which reflect struggle, change and development in society as well as nature.

To understand why a massive object like the sun appears to be in a state of equilibrium, emitting life-giving heat over thousands of millions of years, man first had to understand both gravitation and nuclear reactions, for the emission of heat from the sun is explained by the contradiction between nuclear radiation and gravitation. What keeps the sun in a state of relative equilibrium is the process of nuclear reactions within the interior of the sun, a process of the conversion of hydrogen into helium, which results in radiation pressure streaming from the core to the outer layer. This process is counteracted (opposed) by gravitational pressure of the sun's mass acting towards the sun's centre, thus maintaining a stable condition - as long as the internal stock of hydrogen does not become too depleted. For it must be realised that, in the contradiction motion-equilibrium, motion is absolute, equilibrium relative. Eventually (though it will last a few billion years yet) the equilibrium will be disrupted, but motion will remain, only taking different forms.

Many of our everyday words are actually concepts that arise from everyday existence on earth within ordinary space and time, and they lose their meaning except when taken together as opposed concepts. Thus, up-down; backwards-forwards; in-out; under-over; here-there and similar words

denoting space relations only have significance as a unity of opposites. There is no up without down, no under without over etc. Similarly in relations of time: soon-late; now-then; always-never; often-seldom etc. Our ideas image the real world; only dialectics enables us to image it in its motion.

It is the struggle between opposites within a thing that leads to its movement and development, up to the point where a new thing (or process) emerges and replaces that which existed before. The struggle between an egg shell and the growing embryo it shelters ends in the latter breaking the shell and emerging as a living chick, replacing the egg. The struggle between the positive and negative charges in a thundercloud lead to the emergence of a lightning flash, a new thing which solves the contradiction between the opposed charges. There are countless other examples which can be given. The reader will find many more in Engels' books, 'Anti-Duhring' and 'Dialectics of Nature'.

**LAW II:** The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice-versa.

We spoke before of water being transformed into steam or ice as a result of gradual increase or decrease in temperature, that is, in the quantity of heat in the water. This is a simple example of quantity being turned into quality at a certain point, both substances being qualitatively different from water. There are an infinite number of examples in nature. Every metal has a melting point where it becomes a liquid; every gas will become a liquid when subjected to a sufficient pressure; the addition of a single neutron may be sufficient to produce a qualitatively different substance, an isotope, from a given element. In society, before slavery becomes economically possible the productive forces must reach a certain minimum level enabling the slave to produce more than his own upkeep; similarly a certain quantity of capital must be accumulated before it becomes possible to employ a wage worker.

A war cannot be won by a platoon. But by recruitment a platoon can grow to a battalion, a battalion to a division, and a division into an army capable of winning a war. Similarly, a gradual increase in revolutionary forces within a country can bring about a position of strength from a position of weakness and lead to a successful revolution such as took place in Russia and China, or a successful national liberation war such as took place in Viet Nam. The success of such revolutions in turn gives rise to a great growth in other

revolutionary forces. Thus, not only is quantity transformed into quality, but quality is also transformed into quantity.

Within the working-class Party the gradual accumulation of experience and of Marxist-Leninist understanding leads to improvement in the quality of its members and in the correctness of its policies. At a certain point this is transformed into an increase in numbers, until continued development of this kind leads to the point where the Party becomes the Party of the masses and is capable of successfully leading the socialist revolution.

Every change of quality in a developing thing creates a new basis for quantitative increase. Changes in quality are themselves the result of gradual increase in the quantity or force of one opposite in a contradiction until a point is reached where a transformation to a new quality (a leap to a new state) takes place.

### **LAW III:** The negation of the negation

This 'third law' of dialectics was formulated by Hegel as one of the three classical laws of dialectics. The content given it by Marx and Engels was, in essence, that of a repeated process of the new superseding the old, which is a basic feature of all development. This simply means that in the unfolding of the struggle of opposites in any contradiction, at a certain point a new state emerges, replacing or negating the former state, and in turn it itself becomes negated in further development, and so on. Thus the process appears as a 'negation of the negation.' This can more simply be called the supersession of the old by the new.

What is new in a thing is the opposite to that which is old. Struggle takes place between these opposites, or 'aspects' of the contradiction, leading eventually to the dominance of the new over the old and the emergence of a new quality. Just as the chick supersedes the egg, further development sees the adult bird supersede the chick. In each case the new supersedes the old.

Negation of a former state by a new state is a fundamental law of development. Geology is a multifold record of the replacement of one era by another. In biological development, both in plants and animals, innumerable new species have negated former species. Likewise, in society, new social systems arise as a result of development determined by society's own laws

of motion, each replacing a previous socio-economic formation; from primitive communism to slavery, to feudalism, to capitalism, to socialism (even though capitalism has been restored in formerly socialist countries).

Because it is a natural feature of development, the negation of a particular state will carry with it features of the latter state. There will, in fact, be 'an apparent return to the old,' but the new thing that has developed will be on a new and higher level compared to what existed before.

The above is how Marxists brought up on the works of Marx and Engels essentially understood the negation of the negation.

It became one of the three 'classical laws' of dialectics taken from Hegel and expounded by Engels in his philosophical writings.

But because this formulation was given to one of the classical laws, it does not mean that nothing more can or should be said about them. That would be against the very spirit of dialectics. As we shall see, Lenin, Stalin and Mao all said more about them.

The question can be a confusing one for someone reading either Stalin or Mao on dialectics, then reading Marx, Engels or Lenin and finding different approaches, and in the case of Stalin and Mao a rejection of the negation of the negation.

What is of the first importance is acquiring a basically correct content that is in line with the essence of the dialectical method. Hence this review of the classical laws as a starting point, as an aid to overcoming such confusion as may arise.

In a section of Capital entitled 'The So-Called Primitive Accumulation', Marx gives a thoroughly-detailed, factual exposition of how the small-peasant, private property of the feudal era is seized from him by the burgeoning capitalist class in a lengthy historical process which turns the basis of production from being individual in character to being social in character. In the concluding chapter of this section, entitled 'Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation', he speaks of how mercilessly this 'expropriation of the immediate producers' was accomplished, and then proceeds to show how the action of the built-in laws of capitalism prepare the ground for the

expropriation in turn of the capitalist class. While production under capitalism becomes ever more social, capital is concentrated into fewer hands, and at the same time the system of production organises and disciplines the working class so that they become the gravediggers of capitalism.

After having shown how this process is accomplished in real life, in history, Marx sums up by saying:

'Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. this integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated'.

The capitalist mode of appropriation, the result of the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of the negation. This does not re-establish private property for the producer, but gives him individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era: i.e., on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production. (16)

Thus, after having spent fifty pages proving from history that one part of the process has partially occurred, and that a further part must occur in the future, Marx characterises this as a dialectical process, the negation of the negation.

Bourgeois critics of Marx attacked him then and later with trying to 'prove' the inevitability of socialism through the 'Hegelian Triad'. This latter was an expression to describe development of thought through three phases: a positive statement - thesis, its negative opposition - antithesis, resulting in a higher outcome, synthesis. This is similar in form to the negation of the negation.

Engels pointed out in answer to such an attack from the anti-Marxist and would-be reformer of socialism, Herr Professor Duhring that Marx showed the inevitability of an 'expropriation of the expropriators' from a thorough investigation of the whole process of capitalism's development. Having done

that, he notes that it is a dialectical process, and that in all this there is not the slightest attempt by Marx to 'prove' anything by the negation of the negation.

Speaking of his own dialectical method in contrast to Hegel's, Marx quotes very favourably a review of *Capital*, which he published in the Afterword to the book's second edition, and which he says gives an absolutely correct description of his method. In this description there is not a word about triads, only of Marx's strictly scientific method of investigation which seeks out and discloses the special (historical) laws that regulate the origin, existence, development, and death of a given social organism and its replacement by a higher organism.

### **Marx's Method**

Marx goes on to say that his method is the 'direct opposite' of Hegel's. According to Hegel the development of the idea, in conformity with the dialectical laws of the triad, determines the development of the real world. And it is only in that case, of course, that one can speak of the importance of the triads, of the incontrovertibility of the dialectical process.

A Russian critic of Marx named Mikhailovsky also imitated Duhring in his criticism. Much of the foregoing is in fact a summary of Lenin's scathing rebuttal of the former in *What the Friends of the People Are*.

It must be remembered that in dissociating himself from Hegel's method Marx says: 'With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought', and he adds that 'dialectic ? in its rational form ? includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state ...' (17)

Thus, here we see that the matter can be (and actually is) treated as a contradiction between affirmation and negation, which is repeated in any lengthy process. This should be kept in mind when we come to Mao's treatment of contradiction and the negation of the negation.

At the risk of boring the reader we must spend yet a little more time on this because of the role assigned to the negation of the negation by both Stalin and Mao.

Speaking of Mikhailovsky's repetition of Duhring's arguments, Lenin writes:

Replying to Duhring, who had attacked Marx's dialectics, Engels says that Marx never dreamed of 'proving' anything by means of Hegelian triads, that Marx only studied and investigated the real process, and that the sole criterion of theory recognised by him was its conformity to reality. If, however, it sometimes happened that the development of some particular social phenomenon fitted in with the Hegelian scheme, namely, thesis - negation - negation of the negation, there is nothing surprising about that, for it is no rare thing in nature at all ? It is clear to everybody that the main weight of Engels' argument is that materialists must correctly and accurately depict the actual historical process, and that insistence on dialectics, the selection of examples to demonstrate the correctness of the triad is nothing but a relic of the Hegelianism out of which scientific socialism has grown, a relic of its manner of expression. (18.)

Marx himself was a master at applying dialectical materialism, as any student of Capital would soon discover. He hoped to write an exposition of the subject, but his other work left him too little time. Thus the task of popularising Marxist philosophy (as well as some other aspects of Marxism, such as its analysis of scientific development) fell to Frederick Engels. There are several well-known works in which this is carried out, in particular, the popular general outline of Marxism, Socialism, Utopian and Scientific; Anti-Duhring, a polemical work against the self-proclaimed universal genius and socialist reformer, the book itself being subtitled: 'Herr Eugen Duhring's Revolution in Science', part of which was rearranged to comprise Socialism, Utopian and Scientific; and Ludwig Feuerbach and the End [also translated as 'Outcome'] of Classical German Philosophy. Engels' other main work on the subject, the Dialectics of Nature, is more specialised and directed towards demonstrating that, as he remarks elsewhere: 'Nature is the proof of dialectics'.

In addition, there are Marx's own comments on dialectics and philosophy scattered throughout his writings, including his early works, with Engels; The Holy Family, and The German Ideology, and his early essays criticising



Hegelian philosophy. However, for the most part, up to the time of Stalin, Marxists internationally undoubtedly acquired their knowledge of dialectical materialism through the above-mentioned works of Engels. Lenin was no exception. He defended both dialectical and historical materialism against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois critics of Marx and in practice applied the same dialectics used by Marx and Engels in a similar masterly way to them.

Lenin was also very widely read in philosophy, being familiar with all the main trends in European philosophy (as his works show) and making a particular study of Hegel in order to deepen his understanding of dialectics. Lenin made vital practical and theoretical use of materialist dialectics. First, this was in the recognition of the necessity of building a party of a new type able to conduct revolutionary activity in the new conditions created by the development of monopoly capitalism. Second, in the theoretical and practical struggle against the Machian subjective idealist trend shown by a number of leading Party figures in the period following the defeat of the 1905 revolution. His book, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is both a refutation of this trend (which is basically similar to the modern schools of positivism,) and at the same time is a profound exposition of Marxist philosophy in general and a further development of the Marxist theory of knowledge in particular. Lastly, this mastery of dialectics was shown in the development of a new theory of revolution, bringing Marxism into line with changes in the character of capitalism and the development of a new stage, imperialism. The correctness of his use of the Marxist dialectical method is shown by the triumph of the socialist revolution in Russia in November, 1917.

Although what has just gone before may appear to be an historical digression, it has been necessary to show the basis of the materialist dialectics used by Marx and Engels and mainly expounded by Engels (who said in *Ludwig Feuerbach* that for years it had been his and Marx's best working tool and their sharpest weapon).

The 'law of the negation of the negation' played the least role in their methods. Primarily, they investigated things in their real historical development, motion and change, and because motion itself is a contradiction, they necessarily sought out the contradictions within things as the source of this development. This was the principal foundation of their method. Lenin, too; understood this. In a note in his *Conspectus of Hegel's*

'Science of Logic' just after Hegel's criticism of the Kantian 'thing-in-itself', he writes:

Dialectics is the teaching which shows how Opposites can be and how they happen to be (how they become) identical, - under what conditions they are identical, becoming transformed into one another, - why the human mind should grasp these opposites not as dead, rigid, but as living, conditional, mobile, becoming transformed into one another. (19)

Writing in his 'Logic' on the Law of Contradiction, Hegel notes: 'Contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality and it is only insofar as it contains a Contradiction that anything moves and has impulse and activity'. (20)

In various ways Hegel returns to and repeats this selfsame concept, and Lenin makes this penetrating comment:

Movement and 'self-movement' (this NB! arbitrary (independent), spontaneous, internally-necessary movement), 'change', 'movement and vitality', 'the principle of all self-movement', 'impulse' (Trieb) to 'movement' and to 'activity' - the opposite to 'dead Being' - who would believe that this is the core of 'Hegelianism,' of abstract and abstruse (ponderous, absurd?) Hegelianism?? This core had to be discovered, understood, rescued, laid bare, refined, which is precisely what Marx and Engels did. 21

That is to say, the law of contradiction, the law of the unity and struggle of opposites was precisely the core of the dialectics of Marx and Engels.

The phrase: 'negation of the negation', is included by Lenin in his description of Marx's dialectics in his biographical essay, Karl Marx. But he does not single it out as a law, simply as a feature of development by stages: 'A development that repeats, as it were, stages that have already been passed, but repeats them in a different way, on a higher basis ('the negation of the negation'), a development, so to speak, that proceeds in spirals, not in a straight line' (22)

Lenin in his Philosophical Notebooks also gives emphasis to a statement by Hegel: 'The negative is to an equal extent positive' - negation is something definite, has a definite content, the inner contradictions lead to the replacement of the old content by a new, higher one. (23) Here again is the

idea of the supersession of the old by the new, leading to a higher stage of development by negation of the old, the outcome of a contradiction between the old and the new which, as Marx indicated in the 'Afterword' to Capital, can be regarded as a new affirmation which is in contradiction with a new negation.

In a sixteen-point summary of the elements of dialectics as a more detailed elaboration of a three-point summary by Hegel (See Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic), Lenin again treats the 'negation of the negation' simply as a manifestation of the apparent return to the old - i.e., as a subordinate feature, not a law.

In the same summary Lenin has a note in regard to the second 'law'. In Point 9, speaking of contradiction (the first law), he says: 9) Not only the unity of opposites, but the transitions of every determination, quality, feature, side, property into every other [into its opposite?]. And in regard to Law II, this is later bracketed with another contradiction as follows:

(15) The struggle of content with form and conversely. The throwing off of the form, the transformation of the content. (16) The transition of quantity into quality and vice versa. ((15 and 16 are examples of 9)). (24)

Thus from this we see that Lenin considered that what was previously regarded as a 'classical law', the transition of quantity into quality and vice versa, is in reality simply a particular form of contradiction.

Lenin wrote that not empty, futile, sceptical negation 'is characteristic and essential in dialectics - which undoubtedly contains the element ? of negation and indeed as its most important element - no, but negation as a moment [factor] of connection as a moment [factor] of development, retaining the positive ... (25) Lenin thus clearly adhered to negation as an integral part of dialectics, but not as a basic law.

What Lenin saw was that the essence of negation was the replacement - or supersession - of the old by the new, but that the positive content of the old is retained. This is true in the case of all development. Science has developed precisely in this way, with new and more correct concepts of natural processes replacing concepts formerly thought correct, in the light of the level of the scientific knowledge of the period. This does not mean

uncritical acceptance of all the old. The former state of things is negated; that is the basic feature of the development. The retention of what may be positive and useful to the new is determined by the nature of the struggle between the opposites, the two main aspects of the contradiction.

After the socialist revolution in Russia a petty-bourgeois intellectual trend grew up in the field of literature in particular and culture in general, to abolish all pre-existing culture and start creating - from scratch - a proletarian culture to replace it. Lenin fought vigorously against this trend, known as Proletcult. He wrote: 'Only a precise knowledge and transformation of the culture created by the entire development of mankind will enable us to create a proletarian culture. The latter is not clutched out of thin air; it is not an invention of those who call themselves experts in proletarian culture. That is all nonsense. Proletarian culture must be the logical development of the store of knowledge mankind has accumulated under the yoke of capitalist, landowner and bureaucratic society.' (26) It is in this sense that the negation of the former state of society retains what is useful and necessary to the new state.

So far we have presented, in outline only, some of the main aspects of dialectical materialism as developed by Marx and Engels, and further deepened by Lenin.

### **Stalin's Views**

With the publication of Stalin's essay *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* in 1938, the Communist movement internationally (though most probably not China) tended to make this the focal point of their study of the subject. This situation lasted until Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956 and the suppression of most of Stalin's works. Even after this, many Communist parties regarded this pamphlet as the best short exposition of dialectical and historical materialism.

Stalin's essay, which was published in many different forms, including as a separate pamphlet, is divided into three sections: 1) Dialectics and the dialectical method - including the laws of dialectics; 2) Philosophical Materialism, which considered (a) the materiality of the world; (b) the materialist answer to the basic question of philosophy, namely that matter is primary, and thought or spirit secondary; and the knowability of the world,

the non-existence of 'ungraspable' things-in-themselves, and the fact that the proof of the validity of our knowledge lies in human practice. 3) The third section of the pamphlet concerns historical materialism; the fact that social consciousness derives from and is based on social being; the relationship of the forces of production to the social relations of production; the fact that these relations form the economic basis of society on which is erected a corresponding legal, political and ideological superstructure; and the struggle between antagonistic classes which arises on the basis of the production relations of exploiters and exploited, with the eventual outcome of that struggle being the inevitable overthrow of the capitalist class and the establishment of socialism and communism.

[Pamphlet I of the present series dealt separately with historical materialism. It could have followed the same pattern as Stalin's work, but did not because it would have meant dealing with the most abstract material in the study of Marxism-Leninism i.e., dialectics, at the outset, thus placing an obstacle in the way of learning for newcomers to theory.]

Our assessment of Stalin's pamphlet is as follows. Mainly, the work is intended to be a summary of the teachings of Marx and Engels on philosophy and its application to history, and it succeeds in this very well in respect of historical materialism, and not as well in respect of philosophical materialism. Superficially it would appear that there is little the matter with the section on dialectics, but unfortunately, this section contains serious shortcomings. The main one of these is that, while correctly pointing to the necessity of comprehending all things and processes in their real development, Stalin, enumerating four laws of dialectics, treats them as being all more or less equally important. But this is not the case, nor was it the method followed by Marx, Engels and Lenin, even though appearances may be against Engels. The law which they regarded as the most important and decisive for development is the law of contradiction. We have already demonstrated this in the preceding pages. It can be further shown by some quotations from Lenin's short - but very profound article, culled from his Philosophical Notebooks entitled, in volume 38 of his Collected Works, On the Question of Dialectics (in the 12-volume Selected Works it is: On Dialectics.)

It is plain from the contents of his 'Notebooks' that Lenin intended to write a work on dialectics, but lacked the time. The short article here referred to is a brief summing up of his studies. At the outset he says:

The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts is the essence (one of the essentials, one of the principal, if not the principal, characteristics or features) of dialectics. This is precisely how Hegel, too, puts the matter ?

And further:

The identity of opposites (it would be more correct to say their 'unity', - although the difference between the terms identity and unity is not particularly important here. In a certain sense both are correct) is the recognition (discovery) of the contradictory, mutually exclusive, opposite tendencies in all phenomena and processes of nature (including mind and society). The condition for the knowledge of all processes of the world in their 'self-movement', in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is a knowledge of them as a unity of opposites. Development is the 'struggle' of opposites. The two basic (or two possible? or two historically observable?) conceptions of development (evolution) are: development as decrease and increase, as repetition, and development as a unity of opposites?

In the first conception of motion, self-movement, its driving force, its source, its motive, remains in the shade (or this source is made external - God, subject, etc.).

The first conception is lifeless, pale and dry. The second is living. The second alone furnishes the key to the self-movement of everything existing; it alone furnishes the key to the leaps, to the break in continuity, to the transformation into the opposite, to the destruction of the old and the emergence of the new.

The unity (coincidence, identity, equal action) of opposites is conditional, temporary, transitory, relative. The struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute, just as development and motion are absolute. (27)

What is perfectly plain from this quote is that the law of contradiction (the unity of opposites) is what enables one to understand the self-movement of

things. Thus, materialist dialectics holds that the primary cause of movement and development is internal, arising from the contradiction within things, and not from some outside cause.

Is this not also how Marx saw dialectical motion? What do we see in Capital, his main work? That in his analysis of value, the latter is presented as having a twofold character, being comprised of use-value and exchange-value. Moreover, underlying the twofold character of value - and Marx was the first to recognise this and understand its importance - lay a twofold character of labour, in the form of concrete labour and abstract labour. I was the first to point out and examine critically this two-fold nature of the labour contained in commodities," Marx wrote in Capital. And to emphasise just how important this contradictory character of labour was, he added in the next sentence: "As this point is the pivot on which a clear comprehension of Political Economy turns, we must go more into detail, (28.) which he proceeds to do. And further, he writes to Engels on the completion of the first volume of Capital: The best points in my book are: 1) the two-fold character of labour, according to whether it is expressed in use value or exchange value. (All understanding of the facts depends upon this.) (29) The dialectical method of studying a thing or process from all sides in order to disclose the internal contradictions which impel its development is apparent throughout Capital.

In Lenin's article On the Question of Dialectics already quoted, he later states:

In his Capital, Marx first analyses the simplest, most ordinary and fundamental, most common and everyday relation of bourgeois (commodity) society, a relation encountered billions of times, viz. the exchange of commodities. In this very simple phenomenon (in this 'cell' of bourgeois society) analysis reveals all the contradictions (or the germs of all the contradictions) of modern society. The subsequent exposition shows us the development (both growth and movement) of these contradictions and of this society in the sum of its individual parts, from its beginning to its end.

Such must also be the method of exposition (or study) of dialectics in general (for with Marx the dialectics of bourgeois society is only a particular case of dialectics). (30)

In Lenin's article *On the Question of Dialectics* we have a virtual programme for the further development of dialectics as a study of contradiction; a programme for the exposition of the basic character of contradiction, for the deepening of the understanding of contradiction as the basic cause of development, the internal cause of self-movement, and as a weapon of investigation into all processes and phenomena, into all aspects of society.

This programme appears to have been missed by Stalin. For he makes only a brief summary of the law of contradiction in his pamphlet, the law is placed last in his exposition of dialectical laws, and it is not treated as the basic law.

In his treatment of the dialectical method, Stalin expounds four laws. (1) The law of interconnection and interdependence of phenomena; (2) the law of continuous change and development through the supersession of the old by the new; (3) the law of the transition of quantity into quality and vice versa, and (4) the law of the unity and struggle of opposites.

As can be seen, these laws differ from the three 'classical' laws, which make no mention of any law of interconnection, though certainly classical dialectics recognises the interconnectedness of phenomena, and is itself a logic of motion and development, in contradistinction to metaphysics.

But the internal content of motion is, as we have seen, contradiction, and the interconnection of a given thing or process with surrounding phenomena is no less attributable to the development of contradictions.

The 'negation of the negation' is not mentioned by Stalin. However, it must be said that in regard to change and development, he sees the content of this as the supersession of the old by the new, though he does not use this exact formulation. In connection with the transition of quantity into quality and vice versa, Stalin gives this the status of a distinct law of dialectics, a major law. This is the more surprising as, in spite of quoting from Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, he apparently completely misses Lenin's view, contained in his (previously-quoted) 16-point summary of the dialectical method which figures prominently in the *Notebooks*, namely, that this law of transition is actually a particular case of contradiction.



It is evident from his exposition that Stalin did not realise the overriding importance of the law of contradiction for dialectics and hence was bound to make errors in analysing things.

### **Mao Tse-Tung's Views**

It was Mao Tse-tung who understood Lenin's programme for the further development of dialectics and carried it out in his brilliant essay *On Contradiction*.

Besides the importance of contradiction, Lenin stressed in his article the significance of dialectics as a 'theory of knowledge' (the philosophical term for this is 'epistemology'). Mao also gave this aspect of dialectics a masterly, short exposition (in which he developed it further) in another brilliant essay: *On Practice*. These two pamphlets, whose content is at once popular and profound, are an invaluable guide to the practical work of a Marxist-Leninist party or to any active worker in the class struggle.

Before going on to look at these works of Mao, we said above that Stalin's article did not succeed so well in its treatment of philosophical materialism. We refer here to Section 2 b), which treats of idealism, but only of subjective idealism. It entirely omits reference to the very common trends of objective idealism, which includes most major religions and as well, Hegel's objective idealism. This is a notable omission, considering that the objective idealism of religion is by far the most commonly-held world view of the masses of workers and other toilers throughout the world.

As to Engels, Lenin had the highest regard for his writings on dialectics, but he says in his previously-quoted article on the subject, that in regard to the cognition of the unity of opposites:

This aspect of dialectics (e.g. in Plekhanov) usually receives inadequate attention: the identity of opposites is taken as the sum-total of examples ("for example, a seed," "for example, primitive communism." The same is true of Engels. But [with him] it is "in the interests of popularisation") and not as a law of cognition (and as a law of the objective world). (31)

What Lenin is pointing out is that Engels, while popularising dialectics and making a great contribution in doing so, nevertheless did not bring out the

basic nature of the law of contradiction. Lenin puts things in perspective when he says: 'Dialectics in the proper sense is the study of contradiction in the very essence of objects' (32)

Before proceeding to consider Mao's exposition of the law of contradiction, let us refer back to the question of dialectical laws. In a Penguin Book entitled *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed*, there were published in 1974 (i.e., in Mao's lifetime) a number of unofficial texts of important speeches and articles by Mao dated between 1956 and 1971. While a degree of circumspection in regard to these must be used in view of the fact that they are not authorised texts, it is possible to distinguish the authentic voice of Mao in much of the book. The following are two quotes regarding philosophy which have the ring of truth and do not contradict but are fully in line with, what Mao wrote in *On Contradiction*. The first, from a Talk on Questions of Philosophy on August 18, 1964, is as follows:

Comrade Kang Sheng: 'Could the Chairman say something about the three categories.' [Author's note: this refers to the three dialectical laws]. [Mao]: Engels talked about the three categories, but as for me I don't believe in two of those categories (The unity of opposites is the most basic law, the transformation of quality and quantity into one another is the unity of the opposites quality and quantity, and the negation of the negation does not exist at all.) The juxtaposition, on the same level, of the transformation of quality and quantity into one another, the negation of the negation, and the law of the unity of opposites is 'triplism', not monism. The most basic thing is the unity of opposites. The transformation of quality and quantity into one another is the unity of the opposites quality and quantity. There is no such thing as the negation of the negation. Affirmation, negation, affirmation, negation ? in the development of things, every link in the chain of events is both affirmation and negation. Slave-holding society negated primitive society, but with reference to feudal society it constituted, in turn, the affirmation. Feudal society constituted the negation in relation to slave-holding society, but it was in turn the affirmation with reference to capitalist society. Capitalist society was the negation in relation to feudal society but it is, in turn, the affirmation in relation to socialist society. (33)

Once again, the reference to 'affirmation and negation' as a contradiction harks back to Lenin. Commenting on 'negation' in Hegel's *Logic*, he says: 'Scientific consideration demands the demonstration of difference,

connection, transition. From assertion to negation - from negation to unity with the asserted - without this, dialectics becomes empty negation, a game, or scepticism. (34)

The second quote of Mao's, from a Speech at Hangchow, 21 December 1965, is as follows: 'It used to be said that there were three great laws of dialectics, then Stalin said there were four. In my view there is only one basic law and that is the law of contradiction. Quality and quantity, positive and negative, external appearance and essence, content and form, necessity and freedom, possibility and reality etc., are all cases of the unity of opposites.' (35)

We must say here that in our opinion Mao's view is the correct one. What was formerly expressed as three laws is more correctly expressed as one basic law. Lenin made it clear that the dialectics of Marx and Engels were fundamentally based on the law of contradiction, and his own statements show that he too regarded this law as fundamental. As we have already recorded, he specifically saw quantity and quality as a unity of opposites, while earlier, Marx had already expressed the contradiction: affirmation-negation.

What is clear is that Mao had made a profound study of Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks, and his short article On the Question of Dialectics, and his other writings on philosophy, and he had also absorbed the philosophical views of Marx and Engels. Thus, his own philosophical writings were fully in line with their basic views while making a further advance, and still further demystifying dialectics from the point of view of mass understanding.

If Mao regarded dialectics from the point of view that there was only one basic law, and not three or four, the question arises: why did he not say so in On Contradiction? The fact is that at that time, although the Communist Party of China belonged to the Communist International, their experience of this organisation had taught them that it was utterly wrong on China. But still, the question was one of unity in the world Communist movement, of which Stalin was the undisputed leader. To have disputed Stalin's four laws then would have had a disruptive effect on this unity at a time when the Soviet Union was the only socialist state in the world and a bastion of the international working class.

Mao was able to write *On Contradiction* giving pride of place to one basic law but presenting it in a way that did not concretely criticise Stalin or the Soviet Union.

It is plain from Mao's own works and from the dialectics of the Chinese revolution that by 1938, when he wrote *On Contradiction* and *On Practice* Mao already had a deeper understanding of dialectical materialism than Stalin. Later, he wrote more on the subject, while still giving Stalin credit for his positive achievements.

In a 'Talk at a Conference of Party Committee Secretaries' in January 1957, Mao noted that Marx, Engels and Lenin developed Marxism by wide study and by refuting 'negative stuff' and added:

In this respect, Stalin was not as good. For instance, in his time, German classical idealist philosophy was described as reaction on the part of the German aristocracy to the French revolution. This conclusion totally negates German classical idealist philosophy. Stalin negated German military science, alleging that it was no longer of any use and that books by Clausewitz should no longer be read since the Germans had been defeated. [Author's note: Lenin, however, studied Clausewitz and used his definition of war].

Stalin had a fair amount of metaphysics in him," adds Mao. "In the 'History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course,' Stalin says that Marxist dialectics had four principal features. As the first feature he talks of the interconnection of things, as if all things happen to be interconnected for no reason at all. What then are the things that are interconnected? It is the two contradictory aspects of a thing that are interconnected. Everything has two contradictory aspects. As the fourth feature he talks of the internal contradiction in all things, but then he deals only with the struggle of opposites, without mentioning their unity. According to the basic law of dialectics, the unity of opposites, there is at once struggle and unity between the opposites, which are both mutually exclusive and interconnected and which under given conditions transform themselves into each other." (36)

### **Dialectics - A Practical Weapon**

Mao Tse-tung wrote four essays on philosophy: *On Practice*, *On*

Contradiction, On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People, and Where Do Correct Ideas Come From. Together they constitute a basic means for approaching and solving problems that arise in the practical work of the Marxist-Leninist party.

All of them repay close study, but particularly On Contradiction and On Practice, for they constitute a systematised approach to the understanding of dialectical materialism. What is presented here is only an introductory outline; to actually master these works requires the direct study of them.

Perhaps a few remarks as to their origin may be useful.

In the history of the Chinese revolution errors of both a right opportunist and left dogmatist nature were made by the Communist Party of China in its early history. Particularly damaging were the errors of a group of leaders who were left dogmatists and doctrinaires (led by Wang Ming) who had returned to China after a period of studying theory and the Soviet experience in the USSR, but who did not understand the different character and circumstances of the Chinese revolution. In China the first stage was that of a bourgeois-democratic (or new-democratic) and not a directly socialist, revolution. The latter had to be preceded by the former before it could hope to succeed. But the military and political line of the dogmatists consisted of copying the Soviet experience in a mechanical way, which resulted in heavy losses to the revolutionary forces. Their military line consisted of conducting, or demanding of others that they should conduct, city insurrections, irrespective of losses and repeated failures; and of always meeting Chiang Kai-shek's better-armed and much bigger forces head on in frontal assaults. These tactics resulted in the forced abandonment, at great cost, of the successful large-scale Red Army bases in the South, built up under Mao's leadership, and the consequent necessity of finding a new base in the far north. This had its outcome in the historic 'Long March'. Up to nearly a half-way point in the march, at the township of Tsunyi, the Wang Ming-Comintern line still prevailed, and the revolutionary forces had been decimated. At their last gasp, they called an expanded Political Bureau meeting which changed the leadership, placing Mao at the head. From then on, the revolution never looked back. The Red Army succeeded in establishing a base at Yen-an in the north. It was there that Mao wrote On Practice and On Contradiction to combat and correct the immensely harmful and erroneous trend of dogmatism and its offshoot, empiricism. However, in

order to achieve this Mao had to sum up, systematise and develop further the Marxist-Leninist teachings on dialectical materialism in as popular a form as was possible. In doing this he made the Marxist method far more accessible to the masses than previously, no mean achievement.

What follows here is simply in summary form. The originals must be studied for a proper grasp of the subject matter.

### **The Law of Contradiction**

It is no disparagement to Lenin's genius as a dialectician to observe that the actual enunciation of the law of contradiction as the basic law of dialectics was made by Mao. (Of course, as we have shown, the content of Lenin's views points to precisely this conclusion). Mao makes his important statement in the opening sentence of his essay On Contradiction. It reads:

The law of contradiction in things, that is, the law of the unity of opposites, is the most basic law in materialist dialectics. (37)

Why is stating this as the basic law a step forward in Marxism-Leninism? Because in the study of Marxist philosophy it concentrates attention on what is primary and basic in the method of approach to dialectics. If one gives equal weight to each of the classical dialectical laws, then one can easily end up (as Plekhanov did, for instance) by merely quoting examples of their operation without actually penetrating to the essence of a problem and thereby also seeing what is necessary to solve it. Thus, to recognise and state the determining character of contradiction as the basic starting point of the dialectical method of investigation and study is a definite advance, a new contribution to Marxist-Leninist science, and a valuable aid to newcomers to its study.

Mao points out that a variety of questions arise in connection with this law, and says:

If we can become clear on all these problems, we shall arrive at a fundamental understanding of materialist dialectics. The problems are: the two world outlooks, the universality of contradiction, the particularity of contradiction, the principal contradiction and the principal aspect of a

contradiction, the identity and struggle of the aspects of a contradiction, and the place of antagonism in contradiction. (38.)

What Mao has to say on these problems constitutes the content of his essay.

## I. The Two World Outlooks

These are the metaphysical and the dialectical materialist world outlooks. We have earlier given some explanation of these two outlooks. In connection with metaphysicians, Mao also says:

They contend that a thing can only keep repeating itself as the same kind of thing and cannot change into anything different. In their opinion, capitalist exploitation, capitalist competition, the individualist ideology of capitalist society, and so on, can all be found in ancient slave society, or even in primitive society, and will exist forever unchanged. They ascribe the causes of social development to factors external to society, such as geography and climate. They search in an oversimplified way outside a thing for the causes of its development, and they deny the theory of materialist dialectics which holds that development arises from the contradictions inside a thing. Consequently they can explain neither the qualitative diversity of things, nor the phenomenon of one quality changing into another. (39)

Mao points out that materialist dialectics holds that 'Contradictoriness within a thing is the fundamental cause of its development, while its interrelations and interactions with other things are secondary causes? It is evident that purely external causes cannot explain why things differ qualitatively and why one thing changes into another.' (40)

It is plain that vast changes have occurred in human society both East and West, though no change has occurred in either geography or climate.

Though geography and climate are conditions for its development, human society changes much more rapidly than either because its internal contradictions are different from theirs. Here we must spend a moment on an important, in fact a vital, question which requires a further quote:

Does materialist dialectics exclude external causes? Not at all. It holds that external causes are the condition of change and internal causes are the basis

of change, and that external causes become operative through internal causes. In a suitable temperature an egg changes into a chicken, but no temperature can change a stone into a chicken, because each has a different basis. (41)

Mao points out that the October revolution in Russia had an enormous international impact and that it exerted influence on changes in various countries. But these changes, as in China, were effected through the inner laws of development in these countries.

In New Zealand, the big imperialist powers have influenced the development of New Zealand capitalist society. But their influence has been effected through the inner laws of development of New Zealand capitalism. What pushes forward the development of New Zealand capitalist society is the internal class struggle of workers against capitalists. The influence of imperialism is a secondary cause, and not a primary cause. New Zealand is a developed capitalist country with no feudal class relations. This means that it does not face a bourgeois-democratic or anti-imperialist stage in its revolution, but is in the stage of socialist revolution. For a long-time in the now thoroughly muddle-headed Communist Party of New Zealand the opportunist W.McAra tried to divert the Party (and largely succeeded) on to the erroneous path of a two-stage revolution. According to him, the external contradiction with imperialism was primary, and the internal class contradiction secondary. For him, New Zealand was a 'third-world' type country. Eventually his line was defeated, but it took far longer than it should have, precisely because of lack of understanding of this relationship between internal and external causes which Mao makes quite clear.

This points the way to formulating a correct line for the development of the revolutionary cause in New Zealand. While not ignoring external causes and contradictions, a Marxist-Leninist party must seek out the main internal contradictions. Thus, Mao points out, 'it can be seen that to lead the revolution to victory, a political party must depend on the correctness of its own political line and the solidity of its own organisation'. (42) In other words, it cannot expect or rely on socialism being brought to it from outside. It must be won as the result of internal class and revolutionary struggle.

## II. The Universality of Contradiction



There are two sides to facets of this question. The first, that contradiction exists in all things and processes. We have already explained that this is in line with all scientific (i.e., valid, and not imagined, knowledge).

Contradiction is universal because all things are developing, changing, and hence in motion. Motion itself, as Engels explained in *Anti-Duhring*, is a contradiction. A thing is in one place while it is already moving towards another. The only thing that does not change is the process of change itself.

The other aspect of universality is that a thing or process is in motion while it exists as a specific unity of opposites. Thus a movement exists in the thing or process throughout its life, but when an existing thing or process ends, the former contradiction that moved and developed it gives way to new contradictions within the new thing, which undergoes its own development resulting from the new internal contradictions.

### III. The Particularity of Contradiction:

In his analysis of this side of dialectics Mao broke entirely new theoretical ground. It was a necessary part of his systematic development of materialist dialectics, for it shows the basis of the errors of the dogmatists. (We are certainly not done with this anti-Marxist tendency, as is shown by the thoroughly dogmatist, one-sided and superficial viewpoint of the (now defunct) leader of the Albanian Party of Labour, Enver Hoxha who, not understanding the first thing about dialectics, attacked, slandered and criticised Mao's works on the subject. More is said on this further on.

Mao's analysis of particularity studies, to begin with, several essential features of contradictions.

1) Each form of the motion of matter has its particularity. Each has a specific character which is determined by the particular nature of the contradiction within it. This particular contradiction constitutes the particular essence which distinguishes one thing from another. It is the internal cause or, as it may be called, the basis for the immense variety of things in the world. (43)

Every form of the motion of matter has its own particular contradiction: The following examples are given by both Lenin and Mao: In mathematics: + and -. Differential and integral. In mechanics: action and reaction. In physics:

positive and negative electricity. In chemistry: the combination and dissociation of atoms. In social science: the class struggle.

There are, of course, many others. In war: Offence and defence, advance and retreat, victory and defeat. In biology: Assimilation and dissimilation. (It should be noted that major developments have taken place in the physical sciences and in biology since Lenin. For instance, we would have to add to physics the contradiction between the atomic nucleus and its electron shell and between the strong and electro-weak nuclear forces and between these forces and gravitation. Besides, there have been numerous sub-divisions of each of the sciences, of which physics is only one example, each subdivision having its own particularity of contradiction.)

Particularity of contradiction is what distinguishes each science or sphere of knowledge.

This holds true not only for nature but also for social and ideological phenomena. Every form of society, every form of ideology has its own particular contradiction and particular essence. (44)

The study of the particular contradictions in each science is what enables one to be distinguished from another. It is useless trying to apply the laws of physics to mathematics, or the laws of biology to social science. (This latter has been done, and produced the extremely reactionary outlook of 'social Darwinism' as a basis for claims of racial superiority.)

Social science studies the forces of production and the relations of production, classes and class struggle. (And, we must add, basis and superstructure). Philosophy studies materialism and idealism, the dialectical outlook and the metaphysical outlook.

The study of the universality of contradiction enables us to understand the universal cause or basis for the movement and development of things. But studying particularity is necessary to enable us to differentiate between things and processes and leads us towards solving particular problems in a correct way.

There are two processes in cognition: from the particular to the general and from the general to the particular. Man's knowledge begins with getting to

know the essence of many particulars, and on the basis of this knowledge he can proceed to generalise, finding the common essence of things. This done, he can utilise such generalised concepts to study new, concrete things, deepening the knowledge of both the particular and the general. Dogmatists do not follow this sequence of obtaining knowledge. They end up using rigid formulas applicable to all things at all times. Thus, Marx, Engels and Lenin had written nothing about a revolution proceeding by establishing military bases in the countryside and then surrounding and taking the cities with the aid of city insurrections. Nor had they spoken of protracted war as a necessary part of revolutionary strategy under specific conditions. In their time these forms of struggle were not on the agenda, for they were concerned mainly with developed, capitalist Europe. To the dogmatist Enver Hoxha therefore, only the formula of the Russian revolution could be applied to any revolutions. If they did not proceed according to this formula, they could not be genuine socialist revolutions. In spite of this, the Chinese revolution did not proceed according to Hoxha's metaphysical formula, yet it succeeded. Hoxha asserts that it was never a socialist revolution. And yet Stalin, who was claimed by Hoxha to have made no mistakes, called China a socialist country in his Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR in 1952.

In fact, Hoxha drew most of his lines of attack on Mao from the Russian revisionists, thereby showing that dogmatism and revisionism can turn into each other.

What is necessary to avoid falling into dogmatism is the study of the particularity of contradiction. But there are also other aspects to this side of matters.

2) When we are dealing with different forms of the motion of matter, we start from the fact that each process of real development is qualitatively different. Thus, each will have its own particular contradiction. Here Mao makes the following very important observation:

Qualitatively different contradictions can only be resolved by qualitatively different methods. For instance, the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is resolved by the method of socialist revolution; the contradiction between the great masses of the people and the feudal system is resolved by the method of democratic revolution; the contradiction between the colonies and imperialism is resolved by the method of national

revolutionary war; the contradiction between the working class and the peasant class in socialist society is resolved by the method of collectivisation in agriculture; contradiction within the Communist Party is resolved by the method of criticism and self-criticism; the contradiction between society and nature is resolved by the method of developing the productive forces. (45)

3) To understand what contradictions exist in any major thing is vital. But each contradiction has its own opposites (or aspects) which must be studied, because the understanding of each contradiction depends on understanding the mutual struggle and interdependence of each aspect. These aspects must each be analysed and studied. This is basically what Lenin meant when he emphasised that the most essential thing in Marxism, the living soul of Marxism, is the concrete analysis of concrete conditions. (46)

The substitution of stereotypes for study of a thing in its real development is characteristic of dogmatism.

For instance, people who imagine that a revolution in New Zealand would follow exactly the same path as either the Russian or Chinese revolutions are mechanically transferring stereotypes to conditions which are quite different from either Russia or China. What is basic and common is that there is a bourgeoisie and a proletariat. But we have no feudalism in New Zealand; it has been a capitalist country from the European settlement. There are a variety of contradictions besides that of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. There is the contradiction between the monopolist and non-monopolist bourgeoisie; the contradiction between workers and sections of the petty bourgeoisie including small farmers, and the contradiction between the ruling capitalist class and the oppressed nationalities of the Maori people and the Pacific Islanders.

To solve problems of the New Zealand revolution the particular nature of each contradiction and each aspect of each contradiction must be studied, so that the entire ensemble of contradictions may be understood in their interconnection, and correct policies adopted for their solution.

Following Lenin, Mao castigated people who were subjective, one-sided and superficial. That is, they did not take an objective view of each contradiction, of the concrete conditions in which each aspect develops. They did not view problems all-sidedly. This same problem has beset New Zealand. Take the

1951 Waterfront dispute. This was the largest strike struggle in New Zealand's history, involving a substantial part of the industrial workers. It was a class struggle in the proper sense of the term, i.e., engaging a sizeable proportion of the working class, and inevitably became a political struggle. Though it ended in defeat, there were many important lessons for the working class to be drawn from it, both positive and negative. The great fight of the combined workers against the emergency laws and organisation of scab labour by the Government and the Federation of Labour showed a glimpse of what a united, militant working class could do. Those who participated in it had their class consciousness substantially raised. However, today only the negative side of it is recalled by the dyed-in-the-wool opportunists whose constant refrain - in the service of the employing class - is: We must never have another 1951.

No all-sided analysis has ever been made of this dispute, nor are we going to attempt one here. But there were serious shortcomings on the workers' side. The Communist Party, from which the workers had a right to expect firm leadership, took the road of opportunism. It tamely submitted to the emergency anti-strike legislation, made no attempt itself to break out of it politically or to lead workers to defy it. It issued no independent illegal propaganda and kept its paper, the People's Voice, within the confines of the law. In fact an internal Party circular openly proclaimed the slogan: 'Bury Yourself in the Trade Unions!' This was pure economism, pure tailism, suited to a rearguard, not a vanguard party.

Within the strike leadership - which included some communists - there was a strong tendency towards syndicalism - the idea of one big union winning power by a general strike. Thus the role of the state was not properly understood or given serious thought by the Watersiders' leadership, nor its ability to organise strikebreaking. This is not a criticism of that leadership's firmness, willingness to struggle, ability to organise support locally, nationally and internationally, and certainly not of the rank and file, who fought valiantly.

Nevertheless, subjectivism ruled. The watersiders' leadership understood only the militant workers, not the backward ones, only the influence of the striking workers, and not the influence of the employers, only their own strength, and not the role and strength of the capitalist state apparatus. That is, in relation to the particularity of contradiction they considered only

the favourable conditions and not the difficult ones. Of course, this developed from a trade union struggle into a political struggle, but not a revolutionary struggle. The latter is a much more complex affair - not yet experienced in New Zealand - and one which would demand much fuller analysis.

Superficiality is, not going deeply into the essence of things but merely looking at surface appearances and imagining that this is enough to know all about an object. Says Mao: 'To be one-sided and superficial is at the same time to be subjective. For all objective things are actually interconnected and are governed by inner laws...' (47) These can only be revealed by objective study of each aspect of each particular contradiction, looking at these all-sidedly, going from the outside to the inside and from the inside to the outside.

4) The development of any complex thing proceeds by stages.

Human society has passed through several such stages; Primitive Communism, Slave Society, Feudalism, Capitalism and Socialism. The development of imperialism, of monopoly capitalism, is a particular stage in the development of capitalism. If we considered that the state monopoly capitalism of the present era is the same as the free competition capitalism of Marx's day we would be making a serious error. We would not be recognising - as Lenin did - that imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism, while not changing the fundamental contradiction of capitalism (that between social production and private appropriation) has certain special features because that contradiction has been intensified. These features are expounded in our Party's earlier pamphlet, Imperialism. They include the domination of monopoly, the merging of banking and industrial capital and on that basis the creation of a ruling oligarchy of finance-capitalists in all major capitalist countries, the division of the world between the capitalist combines, and the territorial division of the world between the great powers, leading, because of the uneven economic and political development of capitalism in this stage, to imperialist wars for the redivision of an already-divided world.

Each major process has its stages, during which the fundamental contradiction is intensified, giving rise to new features which must be grasped and understood.

Before World War II a great part of the world's peoples lived under the direct colonial rule of one or other great power. But the intensification of the contradiction between the imperialist great powers and the oppressed peoples led to vast national independence struggles in the colonies. That contradiction has been modified into a contradiction between imperialism and neo-colonial states. But with the advent of a new world crisis this contradiction is itself sharpening, and is weakening imperialism generally.

Within New Zealand, the developing crisis is showing itself in increased exploitation, and mass unemployment, and is raising the possibility of a turn by the working class from the bourgeois Labour Party towards a Marxist-Leninist party. Of course, this presupposes a great quantitative and qualitative rise in the class struggle of the workers. But we are already entering upon this new stage, which will differ qualitatively from previous stages in its political level, providing that the Marxist-Leninist handling of contradictions is correct.

5) The study of the particularity of contradiction at each stage of a process of development must not rest at studying their interconnections during each stage; it must also include the study of the two aspects of each contradiction.

It might appear, if we were studying the struggles between the working class and the capitalist class in New Zealand, that the political parties of the capitalists have been represented in history by the parties of the urban and rural bourgeoisie - in succession, Liberal (later 'United') and Reform which together regrouped under the name National, and the working class represented by the Labour Party and (though never in Parliament and only in a small minority) the Communist Party. But that would be a mistaken analysis. The Labour Party, despite its name and its promises of the 'socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange' once enshrined in its constitution, was from the first a bourgeois party with the aim of introducing mild reforms of capitalism in order to divert the working class from revolution.

Because the New Zealand capitalist class (including the big farmers) shared in the superprofits\* of British imperialist exploitation of the colonies, it was able to make concessions to an upper stratum of the working class in the form of extra pay, housing loans and especially for Labour politicians and

trade union secretaries, positions on Government boards and commissions, concessions which created a labour aristocracy to serve as a prop to the ruling class. The Labour Party was based on this bourgeoisified section of the workers and a growing urban middle class. Its leadership, policy and tactics were bourgeois through and through, and still are.

Thus the working class has, in the main, in practice always followed at the tail of the bourgeoisie and only small sections of it have gravitated towards socialist revolution, at one time represented by the Communist Party. However, from 1980 on, the Communist Party of New Zealand threw out Mao Tse-tung and blindly followed the dogmatist/revisionist road of Enver Hoxha, thereby becoming utterly incapable of leading the working class to socialism. \*\*

From 1963 to 1979 the Communist Party of New Zealand stood firmly with Mao Tse-tung in opposition to Khrushchev's revisionism. However, early in 1980 a factional putsch by an anti-Mao group in the Party leadership shifted the CPNZ on to blind following of Enver Hoxha and the Party of Labour of Albania (the PLA). From then on they relied on the PLA for their theory, and it happened to be thoroughly mistaken on many questions, particularly on Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Revolution, on dialectical materialism and on the fundamental question of continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. It became swell-headed, asserted falsely that it led the ideological struggle against revisionism in the 1960s, and tried to put itself at the head of the world revolution, which it was in practice utterly incapable of leading because of its left dogmatism and ignorance of genuine materialist dialectics.

Because of its dogmatism/revisionism, Albania soon restored capitalism. The CPNZ then proceeded on a line of blind following of Stalin. By 1993 it was ready to ditch Stalin, and by 1994 it somersaulted into a line of denouncing both Stalin and Soviet socialism. It then launched a violent attack on Stalin, completely falsifying history, adopted a pro-imperialist, neo-Trotskyist line, united with the neo-Trotskyist organisation the 'International Socialists', dropped the name 'Communist Party', calling itself, first the 'Socialist Workers Party', then the 'Socialist Workers Organisation' as it merged with the Dunedin-based body of a similar title. In the process it changed the name from Workers Voice (itself a change from the original People's Voice to



Socialist Worker.) All fully in line with the bourgeois principle: If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

This complete and utter degeneration of a one-time solid working-class party can be traced to a combination of the main errors warned against by Mao in the above paragraphs: right opportunism, dogmatism, and empiricism. Probably the decisive factor, once Mao was discarded, was their almost complete ignorance in regard to the application of materialist dialectics in order to solve problems.

An examination of the two aspects of each contradiction brings this out, and shows the necessity of a new Marxist-Leninist party free from revisionism of the right or left.

The particularity of contradiction is not easy to grasp. Mao was the first to really develop this aspect of dialectics. But it is basic to a real understanding and application of dialectics. Mao summarises its main points as follows:

In studying the particularity of any kind of contradiction - the contradiction in each form of motion of matter, the contradiction in each of its processes of development, the two aspects of the contradiction in each process, the contradiction at each stage of a process, and the two aspects of the contradiction at each stage - in studying the particularity of all these contradictions, we must not be subjective and arbitrary but must analyse it concretely. Without concrete analysis there can be no knowledge of the particularity of any contradiction. We must always remember Lenin's words, the concrete analysis of concrete conditions. (48.)

In an earlier pamphlet on Historical Materialism we considered the economic and social contradictions revealed by Marx and Engels as the moving force of society in general and the main socio-economic formations in particular.

In societies where capitalism prevails the basic contradiction is between the social character of production and the private character of appropriation arising from the private ownership of the means of production. Within capitalism, this constitutes the universality of contradiction. But for society in general, it is only one stage of the development of the contradiction between the productive forces and the production relations and thus constitutes the particularity of contradiction.

Contradiction is universal in that it exists in everything and runs through all processes from beginning to end. This is the absoluteness of contradiction. But this universality resides and can only exist in, particulars. No-one can eat fruit as such, or acquire knowledge as such; they are generalised concepts which exist only in particular forms.

Writes Mao:

If all individual character were removed, what general character would remain? It is because each contradiction is particular that individual character arises. All individual character exists conditionally and temporarily, and hence is relative.

This truth concerning general and individual character, concerning absoluteness and relativity, is the quintessence of the problem of contradiction in things; failure to understand it is tantamount to abandoning dialectics. (49)

#### IV. The Principal Contradiction and the Principal Aspect of a Contradiction

These are two further points in the problem of the particularity of contradiction. Indeed, they are vital.

Every complex thing has a number of contradictions within it but one of them is the main or principal contradiction, the existence and development of which determines the development of all the others.

Within capitalism, the main social contradiction is that between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. This determines or influences all the other contradictions which we have mentioned previously in this connection. In addition, it determines or influences the contradictions between the imperialist countries themselves, between them and the neo-colonies and dependent countries, and (earlier) between the capitalist and socialist sectors.

With the establishment of the socialist Soviet Union, the main contradictions in the world went from three to four. To the contradictions within imperialism (that between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; between the

imperialist powers and the colonies and oppressed peoples; and between the imperialist powers themselves) was now added the contradiction between imperialism and socialism.

When World War II began, it did so as a war of two antagonistic imperialist blocs as did World War I. It was an intensification of the contradictions between the imperialist powers. From the point of view of the working class of the groupings of powers involved, it was a war for the redivision of the world between two rival gangs of imperialist bandits, an unjust imperialist war that could benefit only those gangs, and not the international working class. Their duty was to oppose the war.

However, when Nazi Germany and its European allies attacked the land of socialism, the Soviet Union, the character of the war underwent a change. Despite fundamental differences between the USSR and the Allied powers, there now was a common overriding interest between them of defeating the Axis powers. Because the Soviet Union was a vital base for the maintenance and extension of the dictatorship of the proletariat, for the development of world revolution, the main contradiction underwent a change. Within the bloc of Allied powers the class contradiction became subordinated to the contradiction between the Soviet Union and the international working class and oppressed peoples - in temporary alliance with the Allied powers - on the one hand, and the Axis powers on the other.

Naturally, this presented a complicated grouping of contradictions, but while the interests of the USSR and one imperialist bloc temporarily coincided, continued opposition to the war by the working class within that bloc would in practice have been aiding the forces most immediately hostile to the Soviet Union and threatening to destroy it.

Naturally, the Allied bloc did not change its imperialist character, and this governed its policy during the war and in the peace that followed it. But it would have been a serious error not to have seen that a new main contradiction had emerged after the attack on the socialist USSR.

Thus according to the development of the various contradictions in a thing, it is vital to be able to distinguish the main contradiction; and it is necessary also to see that, according to concrete conditions, this contradiction can change, and give way to a different one.

'If in any process there are a number of contradictions', writes Mao, 'one of them must be the principal contradiction playing the leading and decisive role, while the rest occupy a secondary and subordinate role. Therefore, in studying any complex process in which there are two or more contradictions we must devote every effort to finding the principal contradiction. Once this principal contradiction is grasped, all problems can be readily solved'. (50) Mao also adds that there are thousands of scholars and men of action who do not understand this method and consequently cannot get to the heart of a problem and solve it.

Just as in any group of contradictions one plays the principal role and the others a secondary role, so too, in any given contradiction one aspect plays the principal and its opposite a secondary role. While at certain times there may be an equilibrium, this can only be temporary. The nature of a thing is determined by the principal aspect, the one which has gained the dominant position.

But contradictions do not remain static. They develop. And at different stages the roles of the two aspects are reversed. The former principal aspect becomes the non-principal aspect and vice-versa. This change is determined by an increase or decrease in the force of each aspect in the course of the struggle between both in the process of development.

Here we must quote a very important passage from On Contradiction in which the relationship of the other classical dialectical laws as subordinate to and arising from the law of contradiction is made clear for the first time.

We often speak of the 'new superseding the old'. The supersession of the old by the new is a general, eternal and inviolable law of the universe. The transformation of one thing into another, through leaps of different forms in accordance with its essence and external conditions - this is the process of the new superseding the old. In each thing there is contradiction between its new and old aspects, and this gives rise to a series of struggles with many twists and turns. As a result of these struggles, the new aspect changes from being minor to being major and rises to predominance, while the old aspect changes from being major to being minor and gradually dies out. And the moment the new aspect gains dominance over the old, the old thing changes qualitatively into a new thing. It can thus be seen that the nature of a thing is mainly determined by the principal aspect of the contradiction, the

aspect which has gained predominance. When the principal aspect which has gained predominance changes, the nature of a thing changes accordingly.  
(51)

What determines that the new supersedes the old is the struggle of the two aspects of the contradiction in which one grows, develops and becomes predominant, while the formerly dominant aspect becomes minor and gradually dies out because a leap to a new state has taken place, a new thing has emerged.

Here we can see that contradiction is the basic law determining all development, and that the other classical laws of dialectics actually describe the features of development arising from the struggle of opposite aspects of contradictions. They are not separate and independent laws, operating apart from contradiction.

There are many instances of the old superseding the new in history. Under feudalism the bourgeoisie was part of the third estate, part of the people oppressed by the aristocracy. But it represented the new and growing productive forces, increased in size and strength and in the French revolution overthrew the aristocracy and became the dominant class. Despite later apparent reverses (the sort of twists and turns of which Mao speaks) when the monarchy was re-established for instance, the bourgeoisie still basically held power because the newly-developed productive forces were under their control. The proletariat has two or three times since been on the verge of seizing power in France, and it is stronger and more numerous than the bourgeoisie. But international capital has each time come to the aid of the bourgeoisie and shored it up. For all that, in the long run the workers will inevitably succeed in revolution - despite the present dominance of revisionism in the working class.

In Russia the proletariat seized power in 1917 and became the ruling class, while the old capitalist class was overthrown and appeared to have died out. But new bourgeois elements grew strong even under socialism, and capitalism was able to make a comeback.

A similar situation occurred in China in the mid-1970s. A separate pamphlet is devoted to these reverses to socialism, which will, in the course of further development, give way again to the growth of the new in society, the

proletariat and the oppressed peoples who are carrying on growing struggle against imperialism.

A great deal depends on the efforts of the revolutionaries in overcoming difficulties and opening up favourable conditions for advance, as happened several times during the Russian and Chinese revolutions. Conversely, mistakes can lead to reverses, in which difficulties temporarily become dominant.

In discussing the struggle of the opposite aspects of a contradiction, Mao points out that the acquiring of knowledge of Marxism proceeds through assiduous study, transforming ignorance into knowledge, and moves from blindness in its application to mastery in application.

Mao also puts the relationship of a number of basic social contradictions in the clearest of terms. He points out that it is a mechanical materialist conception to consider that the productive forces are always the principal aspect as compared to the relations of production, that practice is always principal as compared to theory, and that always the economic base is principal as compared to the superstructure. True, in each case the first-named usually plays the principal and decisive role, but under certain conditions, the opposite aspects show themselves as decisive.

When further development of the productive forces is prevented by existing production relations, a change in the latter plays the decisive role. Similarly, in an epoch of theoretical chaos, correct theory plays a decisive role, as it did with Lenin's publication of *Iskra* as the theoretical preparation for the party of a new type. As Lenin said: 'Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.' (52)

Likewise when the political, cultural and ideological superstructure obstruct the development of the economic base, then changes in that superstructure play the decisive role.

This view is in full conformity with materialist dialectics, which regards social consciousness as determined by social being, but recognises that social consciousness reacts on social being and the material life of society.

The contradictory forces in any process are uneven. Change is absolute. Equilibrium is only relative. That is why Mao states: 'The study of the various states of unevenness in contradictions, of the principal and non-principal contradictions and of the principal and non-principal aspects of a contradiction constitutes an essential method by which a revolutionary political party correctly determines its strategic and tactical policies both in political and in military affairs. All Communists must give it attention.' (53)

That is to say, it is a key to formulating correct strategy and tactics.

#### V. The Identity and Struggle of the Aspects of a Contradiction

As we have already pointed out, each aspect of a contradiction depends on the other for its existence, that is, they are mutually interdependent. In capitalism, without the bourgeoisie there would be no proletariat and vice-versa; without up, there would be no down, without over, no under, without landlords no tenants and vice-versa, without imperialist oppression of peoples, no oppressed peoples and vice-versa.

This shows what Lenin stressed, when he pointed out that opposites can be identical namely, that the opposite aspects of a contradiction cannot each exist in isolation. This, as Mao states, is the first meaning of identity.

But there is a second, more important meaning: that in given conditions, each aspect can transform itself into its opposite.

Now at first sight this might seem strange, that things can transform themselves into their opposites. But this is precisely what happens as a result of the struggle of opposites. In the course of the struggle one aspect of a contradiction gathers strength and becomes uppermost, whereas formerly it was in an inferior position, while the opposite aspect which was formerly dominant, is reduced to the subordinate position.

In feudal times the aristocracy was the ruling class and the bourgeoisie a class that was ruled. But struggle and revolution transformed the bourgeoisie into the ruling class. Likewise, the bourgeoisie is the ruling class and the proletariat the ruled under capitalism. But struggle and revolution succeeded in transforming each class into its opposite in a large part of the world following the socialist revolution in Russia. The proletariat became the

ruling class and the bourgeoisie the ruled, in socialist society. And, despite reverses, that will recur until finally the proletariat will triumph over the bourgeoisie on a world scale.

The struggle of opposites is universal, and so is their identity. This applies to all things, not only society. This is the dialectics of the movement of opposites in things in the real world. Those opposed to change and development, the reactionaries and metaphysicians representing the obsolete ruling classes, oppose this dialectical view, which holds that there is an identity between opposing aspects of a contradiction and that under given conditions opposite aspects can be transformed into each other. Thus Mao comments:

The task of Communists is to expose the fallacies of the reactionaries and the metaphysicians, to propagate the dialectics inherent in things, and so accelerate the transformation of things and achieve the goal of revolution. (54)

There is a difference between imaginary transformations such as occur in mythology, and in the real transformations that occur in real, developing things and processes.

There is no identity between an egg and a stone, therefore an egg cannot give birth to a stone or vice-versa. There is no identity between a game of chess and a crocodile. Both exist under given conditions and cannot be transformed into each other. The identity of opposites exists only under given conditions.

Within New Zealand, there is no feudal, landed aristocracy to be overthrown in order to establish bourgeois democracy. Therefore there is no need to have a bourgeois-democratic stage prior to a proletarian socialist revolution.

That is, the concrete conditions of New Zealand capitalism differ from those of both Russia and China before their socialist revolutions. In those countries there was identity between the two stages of the revolution. In New Zealand and fully developed capitalist countries there is no such identity. They face a proletarian socialist revolution against their own bourgeoisie. Their own bourgeoisie is also involved, to a greater or lesser degree, with the imperialism of the great powers. There is identity, therefore, between the



struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and also between the struggle of the proletariat against imperialism. These are the conditions which must be understood by the Party of the proletariat in order to lead a struggle to facilitate the transformation of the proletariat into the ruling class and in the suppression of the bourgeoisie and of imperialism.

Earlier in this pamphlet we pointed to the relationship between rest and motion. Mao takes this further, and points out that in all things there are two states of motion, relative rest and conspicuous change. In the first state, only quantitative change (increase or decrease in quantity, size etc.) is taking place. But, resulting from the struggle of opposites, a culminating point is reached when conspicuous change takes place in quality. In the first case, the outward appearance shows a thing at rest. In the second, we see the dissolution of the old state and its replacement by a new state, transformation of quantity into quality.

This transformation of relative rest into conspicuous change, of quantitative change into qualitative change, is occurring constantly in all processes in nature, society, and in human thought which reflects the real, objective world in development.

We see it in society in the growth of conditions which lead to a revolutionary situation. A dialectical understanding of the identity and struggle of aspects of a contradiction equips Marxist-Leninists to prepare for, and understand how to utilise the development of such a situation, so as to procure a favourable outcome for the proletariat and the mass of working people.

## VI. The Place of Antagonism in Contradiction

In discussing this aspect of dialectics, Mao expands considerably on the distinction between antagonism and contradiction noted by Lenin, who said: 'Antagonism and contradiction are not at all one and the same. Under socialism, the first will disappear, the second will remain'. (55)

Lenin was the first to draw attention to this distinction, though Marx and Engels often referred to antagonisms, and the distinction was implicit in their writings. In his famous Preface to the Critique of Political Economy, Marx made the profound observation that: 'The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production ...' though

assuredly he, like Lenin, never envisaged an end to contradiction under socialism or communism.

Mao writes in *On Contradiction*: 'The question of the struggle of opposites includes the question of what is antagonism. Our answer is that antagonism is one form, but not the only form, of the struggle of opposites'.<sup>56</sup> He shows both in this work and in a further, later essay *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, that distinguishing between the two types of contradictions, antagonistic and non-antagonistic, is a matter of great practical importance for revolutionary parties, both before and after a socialist revolution, for it closely concerns the question, who are our friends and who are our enemies.

He points out that opposites can co-exist for a long time in society in the form of exploiting and exploited classes, but not until this contradiction reaches a certain stage does it manifest itself in the form of open antagonism and develop into revolution.

Antagonistic contradictions also exist in nature when they reach the stage of open conflict which resolves old contradictions to produce new things.

In capitalist society, the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat exists from its beginning. However, only when it reaches the stage of open class conflict does it become antagonistic in form. Then revolution is on the agenda.

Some contradictions are antagonistic in nature, others are not. Antagonism is not the universal form of contradiction. This is most important to remember, for the methods of resolving each of the two types of contradictions differ. Depending on how things develop concretely, some contradictions which are non-antagonistic can become antagonistic, while others which are antagonistic can become non-antagonistic.

Within a Marxist-Leninist party the concrete development of contradictions between correct and incorrect thinking can lead to an antagonistic contradiction if a person persists in a proven error. However if that person corrects the mistake and recognises it as such, then the contradiction can be turned into a non-antagonistic one. The reverse process also holds good.

Under Lenin's leadership, the Soviet Communist Party used correct methods to solve inner-Party contradictions and also contradictions that developed after the socialist revolution between the Party and government on the one hand and different sections of the people on the other. Lenin took great pains to resolve contradictions between the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie, including the peasantry, so that they would not become antagonistic. Similarly, Mao Tse-tung at different stages of the Chinese Revolution defined which classes or sections of classes should be regarded as friends and which as enemies, and adopted different policies towards each section according to whether it could or could not be an ally of the proletariat. This correct policy enabled the revolutionary proletariat to unite the maximum forces possible against the enemy at each stage of the revolution.

While Stalin was an outstanding revolutionary leader, this particular aspect of dialectics was neglected by him. As a consequence, he sometimes treated contradictions within the people (which were essentially non-antagonistic) as antagonistic in form, using wrong methods to resolve them. While this was a fault, Stalin nevertheless remained an implacable foe of imperialism. Khrushchev, on the other hand, tried to turn the antagonistic contradiction between socialism and imperialism into a non-antagonistic one by changing socialism into social-imperialism and restoring capitalism. He became an enemy of socialism in deeds, while pretending to adhere to it in words. His successors, Brezhnev, Gorbachev and Yeltsin followed the same path and restored capitalism.

In his essay *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* (1957) Mao gives an extended account of how the two different types of contradiction applied to China. He pointed out (as did Lenin before him) that in the contradiction between the people and the enemy, the content of who constitutes 'the people' differs at different periods of the revolution and in the period of socialist construction.

Mao writes:

Contradictions in a socialist society are fundamentally different from those in the old societies, such as capitalist society. In capitalist society contradictions find expression in acute antagonism and conflicts, in sharp class struggle; they cannot be resolved by the capitalist system itself and

can only be resolved by socialist revolution. On the contrary, the case is different with contradictions in socialist society, where they are not antagonistic and can be resolved one after another by the socialist system itself. (57)

This was written before Khrushchevism showed itself fully as counter-revolutionary social-imperialism. It soon became clear to Mao (who made it clear to the world) that in real life it was possible for socialism to give rise within itself to an antagonistic class, the new bourgeoisie, consisting of highly-paid bureaucrats, managers, technicians, professional people etc., and a labour aristocracy.

This was a new and unexpected development, showing that to prevent the new bourgeoisie from actually seizing power, as it had done in Russia, the possibilities of its doing so had to be recognised and guarded against by continued class struggle under socialism. In accordance with this understanding, Mao made perhaps his most important contribution to theoretical Marxism, development of the theory of continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. More will be said on this in the next section, but it is sufficient to note here that Stalin had erred in stating in the Constitution of the USSR in 1936, that there were no longer antagonistic classes in the Soviet Union. In fact the new bourgeoisie was an antagonistic class. It was already in existence then, and grew rapidly in the post-war period, enabling Khrushchev, its foremost representative, to gain support for a usurpation of power, leading to the restoration of capitalism.

We leave the question of the rise of this same new bourgeois class to power in China to be dealt with in a separate pamphlet. However, it can be seen from the practical experience of the growth of antagonistic contradictions under socialism that the question of the place of antagonism in contradiction is a very important aspect of the subject, and requires much attention from Marxist-Leninist parties aiming to accomplish a socialist revolution.

We think it is worth repeating Mao's brief 'Conclusion' to On Contradiction before proceeding to consider the Marxist theory of knowledge.

We may now say a few words to sum up. The law of contradiction in things, that is, the law of the unity of opposites, is the fundamental law of nature and of society and therefore also the fundamental law of thought. It stands

opposed to the metaphysical world outlook. It represents a great revolution in the history of human knowledge. According to dialectical materialism, contradiction is present in all processes of objectively existing things and of subjective thought and permeates all these processes from beginning to end; this is the universality and absoluteness of contradiction. Each contradiction and each of its aspects have their respective characteristics; this is the particularity and relativity of contradiction. In given conditions, opposites possess identity, and consequently can co-exist in a single entity and can transform themselves into each other; this again is the particularity and relativity of contradiction. But the struggle of opposites is ceaseless, it goes on both when the opposites are coexisting and when they are transforming themselves into each other; and becomes especially conspicuous when they are transforming themselves into one another; this again is the universality and absoluteness of contradiction. In studying the particularity and relativity of contradiction, we must give attention to the distinction between the principal and the non-principal contradictions and to the distinction between the principal aspect and the non-principal aspect of a contradiction; in studying the universality of contradiction and the struggle of opposites in contradiction, we must give attention to the distinction between the different forms of struggle. Otherwise we shall make mistakes. If, through study, we achieve a real understanding of the essentials explained above, we shall be able to demolish dogmatist ideas which are contrary to the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism and detrimental to our revolutionary cause, and our comrades with practical experience will be able to organise their experience into principles and avoid repeating empiricist errors. These are a few simple conclusions from our study of the law of contradiction. 58

## VII. The Theory of Knowledge

We have already given a brief summary of this in connection with the mass line, in the pamphlet on the Marxist-Leninist party. Mao deals with this theory substantially in *On Practice*, and briefly in his fourth philosophical essay, *Where Do Correct Ideas Come From* (May, 1963).

We shall mention some further aspects here, but refer the reader to Mao's original pamphlet for proper and full exposition.

Of course, Mao did not invent the Marxist theory of knowledge, which is an integral part of dialectical materialism. Marx and Engels were the first to see and to expound the real relationship between human knowledge and human practice, refuting the main idealist theories on this subject. Engels in particular, in *Anti-Duhring and Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, demolished from the dialectical materialist viewpoint not only the Kantian theory of unknowable 'things-in-themselves', but also the erroneous line of agnosticism in relation to the validity of human knowledge.

Lenin further developed the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge in his scathing indictment of the errors of the 'Machians', the disciples of the Austrian physicist Ernst Mach, particularly certain members of the Party, who tried to substitute the subjective idealist outlook of positivism for Marxist materialism in the period after 1905. The book *Materialism and Empirio Criticism* in which he carried out this task is a profound work, and repays much study. (Because the question of epistemology also arises out of the struggle of the two philosophical lines over the basic question of philosophy - already quoted - we have treated certain aspects of this question under the heading of 'Philosophical Materialism' early in this chapter. Particularly this applies to the use of quantum mechanics and the 'uncertainty principle' by modern positivism. Because of its specialised character we thought it better to introduce it earlier, rather than here.)

Mao's *On Practice* is more of a popularisation, though nevertheless it also is profound. It is based on the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Although it is only a short essay, in it Mao systematises all the main features of the Marxist-Leninist theory of knowledge, and does so in a way that makes the subject accessible in readily understandable form. But, of particular importance, Mao takes this theory out of the apparently distant (though vital) realms of philosophy and shows how, once grasped, it is of practical importance in the everyday work of Marxist-Leninists. This is because the essay was aimed at correcting the errors of dogmatism and empiricism that had arisen out of revolutionary practice and had plagued the Communist Party of China in the 1930s.

How does man obtain valid, reliable knowledge concerning nature, society and human thought?

Marxism answers, in the first place, through the struggle for production. Producing his own means of subsistence marks man off from the animal kingdom. It is the most fundamental practical activity of man. If production ceases, social life becomes impossible. Throughout history, therefore, man's productive activity is his most fundamental activity. In the course of it he receives many sense perceptions which enable him to achieve a certain level of perceptual knowledge of things and processes around him. This is the first stage of knowledge. At a certain point his increase in perceptual knowledge manifests itself by a leap into the second stage of knowledge, rational knowledge, a stage in which concepts are formed, generalised ideas that enable man to understand whole classes of objects, whereas formerly he only understood individual things or particular features of them. Not only that, with the aid of these general concepts man can reason and draw conclusions which enable him to understand the essence of given things and processes. These are the first two stages of knowledge or cognition. But man's knowledge is still incomplete at this point, for he cannot be sure his new knowledge and his conclusions from it are correct.

To test their correctness, a third leap is necessary, a leap back from rational knowledge into practice, practical activity. For this is the real test, to see if our views, concepts, opinions, judgments and conclusions really correspond to the actual things and processes existing in the objective world, the external reality around us. If they do, then that part of the process of the development of our knowledge of a thing or process can be regarded as correct, and we can go on to study other things and processes using this correct knowledge as a jumping-off place. If, however, our concepts, conclusions etc. are shown in practice not to correspond with objective reality, we must investigate further to find what is faulty and incorrect and take steps to bring it into line with the objective world.

This process is a continuous one in the whole history of mankind. Understanding this sequence is necessary in order to grasp the importance of practice as the starting point for the acquisition of knowledge and the necessity of the return to practice for testing it. It shows that:

1) All man's knowledge has its origins in human practice, social practice. Man's ideas are not innate, nor do they drop from the skies. They come from social practice of three different but interrelated kinds: the struggle for production; the class struggle and scientific experiment.

The knowledge of the class struggle is of particular importance in understanding and changing society. Man acquires knowledge of social classes in the course of the struggle for production because relations between classes are social relations which arise independently of man's will, in the practical activity of production. As classes develop, so does the struggle of classes, giving rise to man's knowledge of this struggle.

2) The stage of rational knowledge, while dependent on perceptual knowledge, is the more important stage, for it enables one to penetrate to the essence of things.

Perceptual knowledge is, in the first place, a knowledge of particulars, of the many individual sides or aspects of our natural surroundings. Rational knowledge, however, enables us to move from the particular to the universal in our understanding. Says Mao:

The real task of knowing is, through perception, to arrive at thought, to arrive step by step, at the comprehension of the internal contradictions of objective things, of their laws, and of the internal relations between one process and another, that is, to arrive at logical knowledge. (59)

Logical knowledge enables us to grasp the whole of a process or group of phenomena, and not just their separate parts.

Understanding this truth shows us the importance of theory. It shows up the error of empiricism, which is rule-of-thumb Marxism, which concentrates on narrow practical activity and denies the need for theory.

This does not mean that theory is primary. By no means. Practice is primary. Mao sums it up cogently in the following words:

The Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism has two outstanding characteristics. One is its class nature: it openly avows that dialectical materialism is in the service of the proletariat. The other is its practicality: it emphasises the dependence of theory on practice, emphasises that theory is based on practice and in turn serves practice. (60)

The question of learning from practice, of taking part in practice in order to learn from it, is a guard against dogmatism, is a guard against mechanical



transfer of one country's solution of certain problems to another country where the form of the problem is quite different and practical experience points to a different solution. This was a problem in the Chinese revolution, where a group in the Party sought to treat theory as a dogma, as providing the answer to every problem irrespective of time, place, circumstances, and the actual conditions in which the problem arose. We have already mentioned this in connection with the Wang Ming line in an earlier section.

But correct theory is nevertheless an invaluable weapon, not to provide ready-made solutions, but to be a guide to action. The theory of the New Zealand revolution has yet to be properly developed. It can only develop as a correct theory in close connection with practice. There is no doubt that it will have overriding basic things in common with all socialist revolutions, particularly the aim of smashing the bourgeois state machine and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. But it will also have some certain special features arising out of the particular conditions, the actual historical development of New Zealand as a capitalist country. Marxism-Leninism requires that these be taken into account, that in other words we must study the class struggle and the ongoing experiences of the New Zealand revolution, scanty though these may be at the present time, in order to arrive at an understanding of the laws of the New Zealand socialist revolution.

Again we return to Mao for a brief but profound statement on the relationship of practice to theory.

Our practice proves that what is perceived cannot at once be comprehended and that only what is comprehended can be more deeply perceived. Perception only solves the problem of phenomena [appearances - RN]; theory alone can solve the problem of essence. The solving of both these problems is not separable in the slightest degree from practice. (61)

All knowledge originates in perception through man's senses. But we cannot each have direct experience of more than a small part of the world of nature and social life as a whole. Thus, for the most part, our knowledge consists of indirect experience, the experience of others. But an immense body of social knowledge has been built up which is reliable because it has been repeatedly tested in practice. This is obvious enough when it concerns the existence of peoples and places that have become commonplace to us through the media

and modern communications. For instance, we do not question the existence of the Taj Mahal or icebergs or Mount Everest. These are examples of indirect perceptual knowledge. But what of scientific laws, of social science, of the class struggle or revolutions? These are not so easy to judge, for hostile class interests may distort the truthful interpretation of experience.

Lenin noted that:

Thought proceeding from the concrete to the abstract - providing it is correct ? does not get away from the truth but comes closer to it. The abstraction of matter, of a law of nature, the abstraction of value, etc., in short, all scientific (correct, serious, not absurd) abstractions reflect nature more deeply, truly and completely. (62)

Providing that a genuinely scientific approach is made in the process of scientific abstraction, it is possible to achieve reliable, valid knowledge of what is investigated. When we come to the social sciences, however, particularly economics, politics and history, e.g., the standard teachings on them are determined by the interests of the ruling, capitalist class. Thus, they are not scientific abstractions. Marxism-Leninism, as a science of society, is scientific, not being concerned with distorting objective reality in order to serve the interests of the capitalist class.

Thus, the indirect experience summed up in basic Marxist-Leninist theory is reliable, valid knowledge, for it is in the interests of the working-class to uphold science. We cannot all have had direct experience of the October Revolution, but we have reliable knowledge of it in the writings of Lenin and the Bolsheviks of the time, and we can understand this revolution more deeply and fully if we have our own direct experience of revolution.

Thus, knowledge as a whole is inseparable from direct experience.

The movement of knowledge from the perceptual to the rational stage, and the further stage of testing our rational knowledge in practice is a continuous process of bringing our thinking into line with the real movement of the objective world; it continually raises the level of our knowledge of things and processes in what is relatively a never-ending spiral. This same movement holds good in the practical day-to-day work of Marxist-Leninists in regard to small tasks as well as big.

First, one investigates, acquires from the masses as much perceptual knowledge as possible of a situation - a strike or protest developing or taking place - then, if the data is sufficiently rich, one generalises or draws conclusions, making a leap into logical knowledge that more truly reflects reality and enables solutions to problems to be found and tested in practice.

Without investigation there can be no properly-founded knowledge. Hence Mao's well-known dictum: No investigation, no right to speak.

In the pamphlet on the 'Marxist-Leninist Party' we pointed out that the mass line is the application of the Marxist theory of knowledge to all work among the masses, both in revolutionary and non-revolutionary times.

There are times when the thinking of some people in the revolutionary ranks does not keep pace with changes in the objective situation. They fall behind and want the development to halt itself to suit them. This tendency exists historically as Right opportunism. Thus, in both the Russian and Chinese revolutions an internal two-line Party struggle had to be waged at various stages against such people in order to keep the revolution moving forward, not stopping at a bourgeois-democratic stage, but continuing the development of class struggle so as to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is true that later, this was undermined from within, but the experience showed the correctness of the general principle of applying the mass line.

To stop at the stage of rational knowledge (i.e., the generalisation of experience) without testing it in practice and following the movement in its continuous spiral development, that is, to treat theory as a dogma, is another mistake found in revolutionary ranks which contravenes the mass line and runs counter to the Marxist theory of knowledge.

And a third type of person is the narrow practical worker who stops short at perceptual knowledge and couldn't care less about theory, having the mistaken belief that practice being primary means that it is the only thing that counts, thus committing the error of empiricism, of relying solely on experience and also violating the Marxist theory of knowledge.

This latter error is very common in small, young and immature parties. Often - as in New Zealand - their forces are small, active workers are

overloaded with practical tasks, and the mass line stops at perceptual knowledge. It is also a heritage of the times when Marxism-Leninism was not studied seriously or deeply because the 'big' parties such as the CPSU or the Communist Party of China were the people who did the theoretical work, and blind following was the norm.

Mao is concerned not simply with knowing the world, though that is the first step, but especially with changing it, in accordance with the viewpoint expressed by the young Marx in his Theses on Feuerbach. 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.' (63) He concludes On Practice with the following brief summing up of the content of the pamphlet, which is also a guide to practical work.

Discover the truth through practice, and again through practice verify and develop the truth. Start from perceptual knowledge; then start from rational knowledge and actively guide revolutionary practice to change both the subjective and the objective world. Practice, knowledge, and again practice, and again knowledge. This form repeats itself in endless cycles, and with each cycle the content of practice and knowledge rises to a higher level. Such is the theory of knowledge, and such is the dialectical-materialist theory of the unity of knowing and doing. (64)

## **A Final Word**

On Contradiction and On Practice are not only expositions of basic Marxist philosophy. They are also, given proper study and understanding, invaluable guides to correct, practical revolutionary work by a Marxist-Leninist party. Therein, in reality, lies their greatest significance. They may not be easy reading. But they are vitally important for the accomplishment of the task of successfully leading the struggle of the working class and the masses for the overthrow of capitalism and imperialism and the establishment of socialism.

\* Superprofits are those in excess of the average profits obtainable by capital from exploitation at home. For much of New Zealand's history its capitalists were able to obtain long term agreements with Britain to take the greater part of New Zealand's primary products at relatively stable high prices, thus sharing in the imperialist super profits from British colonialism. Although Britain cannot play the same role today, its place is taken by other imperialist powers such as the USA and Japan. Such agreements are the

main way in which New Zealand's ruling class still obtains a share in imperialist superprofits which provide in New Zealand, as elsewhere, the economic basis of opportunism and the creation of a labour aristocracy from an upper layer of the working class.

\*\*Even more so is this the case today (1997), when it has dissolved itself (1992) and swung over to counter-revolutionary Trotskyism, uniting with the Trotskyist 'Socialist Workers' Organisation.

## NOTES

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45) *ibid.*, pp. 321-322.

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61) *ibid.*, p. 299.

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