Part 2 The Great Transition: The Soviet Union

13 *Background of Marxism*

INTRODUCTION

The necessity for collaboration between the Western democracies and the Soviet Union has been officially recognized by the United Nations. To be of real value, this collaboration cannot be limited to wartime but must continue thereafter in the interests of a durable and productive postwar organization.

The governments of the United States and the Soviet Union are, first of all, signatories of the Atlantic Charter, the Soviet Union signing this Joint Declaration of America and Britain (of August 14, 1941) on January 1, 1942. The two countries further declared their intention to collaborate actively by signing an agreement, on June 11, 1942, outlining Russia's participation in the Lend-Lease Act. In Article VII of this agreement it is stated that the guiding principle should be "to promote mutually advantageous economic relations between them (U.S.A. and U.S.S.R.) and the betterment of world-wide economic relations." The two nations agreed further to avoid all "discriminatory treatment in international commerce" and promised to expand "production, employment, and the exchange and consumption of goods, which are the material foundations of the liberty and welfare of all peoples. . . ." [1]

The Moscow Conference was of even greater importance for the creation of a permanent working understanding between America and Russia. Delegations led respectively by Foreign Secretary Cordell Hull for the United States, Anthony Eden for Great Britain, and V. M. Molotov for the Soviet Union issued a Joint Four Nation Declaration, the Republic of China being included as an equal partner, on November 1, 1943. In addition to declarations concerning Italy and Austria, and a statement on Axis atrocities (signed by President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and Marshal Stalin), the four powers proposed united action

[1] Mutual-Aid Agreement between the United States and the U.S.S.R. of June 11, 1942. Quoted from *International Conciliation*, New York, September, 1942, No 382.

for the termination of the war and the establishment of an "international organization, based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all peace loving States, and open to membership by all such States, large and small, for the maintenance of international peace and security."

The Moscow Conference was followed by another at Teheran, concluded on December 1, 1943, and by a third one, at Yalta, ending on February 11, 1945, where the leaders of the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union met to concert their efforts for the prosecution of the war and to agree upon the solution of political problems arising out of the defeat of Nazi Germany.

On the basis of the treaties to which the United States and the Soviet Union are partners and in which they have pledged themselves to close collaboration for the organization of a better post-war world, relations between the two countries will have to be built on a foundation of realism and mutual tolerance. Joseph Stalin expressed his confidence in the possibility of peaceful co-operation between the two countries long before the Moscow, Teheran and Yalta Conferences when he said:

> American democracy and the Soviet system may peacefully exist side by side and compete with each other. But one cannot evolve into the other. The Soviet system will not evolve into American democracy and vice versa. We can peacefully exist side by side if we do not find fault with each other over every trifling matter.[1]

The American approach was well formulated in a recent account on Soviet Asia:

> After the victory, which her dauntless fighters at the front and her people behind the lines are sacrificing so much to win, the Soviet Union will play an active and important role in world affairs, and American-Soviet-British friendship, under the terms of recent pacts, will become a cornerstone of the post-war system of peace and security. In order to construct this friendship on a correct and adequate foundation, it is essential that both Americans and Russians learn a great deal more about each other than they know today.[2]

[1] From Stalin's interview with Roy W. Howard, March 1, 1936 See also *Stalin's Kampf*, M. R. Werner, ed., Howell, Soskin, Publishers, Inc., New York, 1940, p. 327.

[2] R. A. Davies and A. L. Steiger, *Soviet Asia*. Dial Press, Inc., New York, 1942, p. 25.

This approach was confirmed officially by a White House communiqué commenting on the Lend-Lease Agreement in the following words:

> . . . Further we discussed the fundamental problems of cooperation of the Soviet Union and the United States in safeguarding peace and security to the freedom-loving peoples after the war. Both sides stated with satisfaction the unity of their views on all these questions. . . .

A durable postwar reconstruction, however, must be built upon more than commercial treaties. The value of the Lend-Lease Agreement lies in the fact that, beyond economic arrangements, it envisages far-reaching collaboration for which commercial collaboration is just a point of departure. The Moscow, Teheran and Yalta Conferences are political events in the broadest sense and by far transcend the realm of economy. History since 1918 has proved that no commercial treaty is durable unless accompanied by political and cultural agreements. If there cannot be full cooperation politically and culturally, universal economic planning will not be built on solid foundations. It is therefore essential that America, Britain, and the other United Nations approach the problem in a dispassionate and objective manner, uninfluenced by a prejudice against Sovietism and with a willingness to understand Soviet psychology and ideology. Naturally, a corresponding approach on the part of the Soviet Union is equally necessary.

To understand the Soviet Union, however, it is not enough to be acquainted with the application of its economic philosophy to its social and political life. One must also understand Russian history and the national psychological traits developed by this history in order to appreciate recent achievements.

For many centuries, the Russian people were suppressed by semibarbarous rulers supported by the aristocracy and the wealthy landowners. The masses lived in serfdom and misery. Illiterate, hopeless, and superstitious, they sought in various ineffective ways to escape the wretchedness of their existence. Centuries of constant suppression developed characteristics of self-effacement, caution, humility, and passive resignation to fate. Influences from the Far East, the Asiatic contempt for the value of human life, the Asiatics' capacity for suffering, have all been instrumental in mold-

ing the psychology of the Soviet peoples from Kamchatka to the borders of Poland, from the Arctic to Mongolia.

Russia has known many internal troubles. Rebellions were rarely staged by the common people but rather by the nobility, later by the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia. Until 1917, the major revolutions have not been proletarian in nature. For example, the rebellion against Czar Ivan the Terrible, about 1570, was staged by the powerful Boyars who resented Ivan's severe military dictatorship; the "Decembrists" of 1825 were mostly aristocratic officers who had seen action in the war against Napoleon and certainly had no love for the masses. Even the revolution of 1905 was not entirely the work of the common people. This last was superficially successful in that the Russian Empire from then on was governed under a constitution; however, since the czar had the right to nominate at least half of the "people's representatives" the chief aims of the rebels were thwarted.

The czarist government was also backed by a church submissive to the state. This church devoted more care to the preservation of its vested interests than to the great Christian principles which it was supposed to uphold. After the development of industrial capitalism, factory workers in the cities became as destitute as the small peasants or farm hands who earned too much to starve but too little to live. There was no social legislation to speak of and no opportunity for the poor to better their lot. The czarist government had one aim only, namely, to protect the interests of the ruling classes regardless of the welfare of the common people. Not until the Revolution of 1917 were genuine reforms enacted.

The proverbial Russian patience came to an end during the First World War. The weakened condition of the czarist empire, and the armed soldiers—mostly workers and peasants—returning or deserting from the front made possible the outbreak of a revolution which had been systemically prepared by exiled radicals. All of them were disciples of Marx and Engels.

Although Marxism has undergone great and far-reaching revisions, it is still a dominant influence in Soviet thinking. Before the fundamentals of Marxism are sketched, a brief survey of the development of socialism may facilitate the understanding of the rather complex Marxian philosophy.

FORERUNNERS OF MODERN SOCIALISM

1. *The Term "Socialism."* The discussion of socialism will be confined in the main to those historical and contemporary phenomena responsible for the formation of Sovietism, in other words, proletarian socialism. This socialism developed during the nineteenth century and found its purest expression in the economic philosophy of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

There have been many forms of nonproletarian socialism. The legendary Inca state, the ancient state socialism of Sparta which has seen a rebirth in modern military totalitarianism (national socialism), the Platonic idea of a leading class of philosophers who were supposed to live in a moneyless, equalitarian community, the Christian monastic organization, were not socialistic in the contemporary sense of the word. Also, the famous utopias, written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, can hardly be regarded as more than vaguely related to modern socialism. Thomas More's *Utopia*, Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, and Francis Harrington's *Oceana* all made suggestions regarding the progress of social justice. Both More and Harrington claimed that the ills of society have their source in private property and were unconcerned with the class concepts which popularized socialism among the masses after the industrial revolution.

Nor can Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of the most radical eighteenth-century adversaries of absolutism, be classified as a predecessor of socialism as has been attempted by some. Rousseau himself, however, contributed greatly to political liberalism. He supplied many slogans to the French Revolution, but this revolution was nonproletarian and the communist and collectivist agitation of a man like Babeuf (about 1796) had no practical consequences.

Modern socialism, which is anticapitalistic and proletarian, has roots in the teachings of all those liberal seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers who demanded that the state recognize the right of the individual and abolish the privileges of the few in the interest of the people. For Locke, the "people" meant a fairly limited group of society; Rousseau's meaning is nearer to our usage of the term. But since the development of industry and the growth of the proletariat are essentially developments of the nineteenth

century, it is only during this period that the history of modern socialism is of immediate interest.

The work of men who wrote to propagate socialism or campaigned for the introduction of socialistic reforms for the benefit of the masses may be divided into two stages. The first period witnessed the discussion of fundamental social and economic questions and some attempts, usually Utopian, at instituting socialistic experiments. The second period was one of maturing and increasing aggressiveness. Its radicalism developed into the socioeconomic system of Marx and Engels. Modern socialism, as it was conceived by the Russian Revolution, was built upon the doctrines of these two men. All later socialist theories are largely modifications of Marxism. Leninism, Trotzkyism, and Stalinism are also but variations of the theories of Marx and Engels.

Socialism, in this modern sense, is the attempt to bring about a new socioeconomic order suited to the needs of the masses of the working people. Socialism strives for the political and economic control of the state by the masses in the interest of society as a whole rather than in the interest of individuals. In the Marxist-Leninist view, it is a transitory stage supervised by the dictatorship of the proletariat and designed to prepare the way, ideologically and economically, for the ultimate goal of a communist society. Such a society would no longer need a state and consequently would be based on the ideal of absolute freedom through altruistic and voluntary subordination of the individuals to society without the incentive of competition for material goods.

Socialism is fundamentally materialistic. It looks upon life as the highest good and is distrustful of philosophic idealism which regards ideas as the ultimate reality. Socialism claims that this world and not the next is its concern; it is distrustful of spiritual doctrines which it considers as conceived by the ruling and educated classes for the purpose of holding down the masses. It is opposed to religion because it holds the churches to be tools of the ruling classes rather than altruistic social-minded humanitarian institutions. "Religion is an opiate for the people," Marx proclaimed.

Socialism believes in the equal responsibility of all individuals toward society and in the necessity of education toward the recog-

nition of this principle. It calls for the suppression of those individuals who are not willing to subordinate their own interests to those of the community in and for which they live. Nevertheless, modern socialism is not necessarily standardized equalitarianism; it is willing to give a greater share of goods to those members of society who through their work contribute more to the general well-being.[1] The common good is above the individual good because only the happiness of the community can guarantee the happiness of the individual.

Historically, the development of socialism changed from idealistic humanitarianism to an economic system that found its practical expression in the proletarian socialism of Bolshevist structure. For the understanding of this Russian type of socialism, a brief survey of pre-Marxian socialism may be valuable, before Marxism as the basis of Soviet ideology is explained. No attempt will be made to sketch the historic continuity of socialism up to Marx; only some of the men and their works will be mentioned whose influence contributed particularly to the formation of socialistic thought.

2. *Humanitarian or Utopian Socialism.* One of the first pioneers of modern socialism was Saint-Simon (1760–1825), a naively idealistic humanitarian. He conceived of social development in cycles, alternately constructive and destructive, and believed that after the destructive age of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars a time for reconstruction had come. The ideal state envisaged by Saint-Simon and his followers would be guided by engineers, scientists, and captains of industry who would sit in the legislative body. The wise leadership of these people would minimize the role of politics. Likewise, in the domain of religion, the clergy would become superfluous for the philosophers would develop a new type of Christianity.

While not expressly anticapitalist, this system would entail the abolition of private property. The emphasis on the cooperative form of the ideal society, a society in which every member would find his proper place according to his abilities, made it inimical to individualism.

Saint-Simon's approach was essentially theoretical and emotional. Like most social reformers of this first period, he built his conceptions on the fundamental belief that man is good and that help to the underprivileged would contribute greatly to the progress of human society.[1]

Charles Fourier (1772–1837), another of the best known French socialists of this first stage, denounced the waste which he saw as the inevitable result of capitalist competition. He demanded the substitution of a cooperative society, progressing "harmoniously," as he described it in his first major work.[2] Like Saint-Simon, Fourier had boundless confidence in human nature. On the strength of this confidence he envisioned a society consisting of so-called phalanxes, units of sixteen hundred persons, organized on a basis of communal living. Each phalanx would live in its own settlement; there was to be no class distinction among the members of the community. Everybody was assured of a minimum of subsistence; part of the surplus of the phalanx's income was to be distributed among its members according to their merits. Life in the phalanxes, free of all restraint, would provide the proper environment which would make it possible for the individual to achieve his own fulfilment, and therefore, happiness.

Fourier enjoyed very little recognition during his life. After his death, a few followers tried to organize cooperative phalanxes. The most important experiments of this kind were made in America in the years between 1840 and 1850, but the attempts were wrecked when it became evident that human nature did not meet Fourier's expectations.[3]

Etienne Cabet (1788–1856) belongs in the same tradition as Saint-Simon and Fourier, but was more radical than either. Under prison sentence for his attacks on Louis-Philippe, which appeared in his widely circulated radical sheet, *Populaire*, he fled to England. While there, he met Owen and became acquainted with More's *Utopia* which made a great impression on him. From this book, he drew many of the ideas for his ideal state which he described

[1] Saint-Simon's basic books are: *Du système industriel*, 1821; *Un catéchisme politique*, 1822; *Le nouveau Christianisme*, 1825

[2] *Théorie des quatre mouvements*, Lyon, 1808.

[3] The best known American phalanxes were the North American Phalanx, the Wisconsin Phalanx, and the Brook Farm Phalanx.

in his *Voyage en Icarie*. Cabet's system was essentially communistic, with the state, through its officials, in firm control of all the means of production, as well as of education and the press; little room was left for individual expression. Believing in the power of example, he too tried the device of a model colony in America—with the usual ultimate results.

In England, Robert Owen (1771–1858) gained a practical knowledge of social deficiencies during the years of his managership of several cotton mills where hundreds of adult and child workers suffered before the days of factory reforms. It was particularly the fate of children, whom he found to be in extremely bad physical, mental, and moral condition, that caused him to believe education and better housing would not only improve the state of the children's health but also the conditions of the community as a whole. Not content with preaching, he made New Lanark a model community, and a financial success in addition.

In 1813, he wrote one of his best known books in which he held that man's character was formed by circumstances over which he had no control. Consequently, he claimed, man should not be blamed for failure nor praised for success. It is necessary, he believed, to place man in the right environment from his earliest years; it is the duty of the state to see that this is done.[1]

Owen agitated for a bill on factory reforms which he had introduced in Parliament. The bill, however, was so mutilated that Owen disclaimed responsibility for it in the amended form. He advocated the establishment of communities of twelve hundred persons settled on about a thousand acres of land with a community kitchen and yet with a traditional family life. These communities which, of course, remind us of Fourier's phalanxes, could be established by state, municipal, or private authority.

Encountering much opposition in England, Owen went to America where he founded, in 1828, the settlement of New Harmony, in Indiana. The enterprise failed and ruined Owen financially. However, his reputation as a social reformer had made him so famous in his native England that, when he came back, newly formed trade unions regarded him as their leader. Government

[1] *A New View on Society or Essays on the Principle of the Formation of Human Character*, 1813

and private enterprise stifled the movement. Owen died, a frustrated but never despairing man.

During Owen's lifetime, and partly as the result of his failure, there also appeared in England the Chartist movement which, in 1838, proclaimed its famous six-point program: universal suffrage, vote by ballot, annually elected parliaments, equal electoral districts, payment of members of parliament, and abolition of property qualifications for election. The Chartists, typical in this respect of the subsequent tradition of British labor, which has never been so revolutionary as French or German labor, remained strictly within constitutional boundaries. The famous Fabian Society, founded as late as 1883, exemplifies the same tradition of attachment to evolutionary rather than revolutionary procedure.

Following these early reformers, there appeared others, less optimistic and less ready to compromise. They shifted from humanitarian idealism to economic systematization; in a few instances, even nihilistic tendencies came to the fore. One of the most interesting representatives of this pre-Marxian conception of socialism was P. J. Proudhon (1809–1865). He shocked the French conservatives with a book *What Is Property?*—a question which he did not hesitate to answer: property is theft. Proudhon was opposed to the prevailing ideas of French socialism and directed his efforts toward economic rather than political reform. As a prerequisite, he insisted that a new economic system could be successful only if based on the principles of justice, liberty, and equality. He demanded that the remuneration for any work should correspond to the measure and quality of the work done. In order to achieve this, he said, the belief in the goodness of man is not sufficient. A complete transformation of the social system must take place.

Proudhon opposed, in principle, the concept of property, whether owned by individuals or by governments. According to him, the transformation of society would occur in two stages of social change, namely, the transition toward reform, then its achievement. During the transitional period, interest was to be abolished, rent was to be reduced, and the right of the state to confiscate property established. While such an era of transition brings to mind some important aspects of the socialistic interim which, according to Marx, would lead to the ideal of a communist society,

Proudhon had no clear conception of the nature of the ultimate form of his socialism. He certainly did not agree with Marx's conception of a classless society. He wrote that "government by man in every form is oppression. The highest perfection of society is found in the union of order and anarchy." [1]

Proudhon remained fundamentally an individualist, opposed to communism as causing injustice and being a "yoke of iron" and "stupid uniformity." No wonder that his relations with Karl Marx, whom he met in Paris in 1845, deteriorated rapidly after a short period of friendship. Proudhon's *Philosophy of Poverty* was attacked by Marx in a venomous pamphlet called *The Poverty of Philosophy* in which Marx took issue violently with Proudhon's anarchistic individualism.[2]

Less individualistic than Proudhon and less extreme than Cabet, Louis Blanc (1811–1882) was for a time one of the most influential socialists in France. He demanded the elimination of competition from which, he claimed, all evils originate. In his book, *L'organisation du travail* (The Organization of Work), he formulated the communist principle: to everyone according to his needs, from everyone according to his abilities. Competition, crushing the weaker, can only be eliminated when the state takes over employment. Blanc suggested the establishment of *ateliers sociaux*, social workshops, to be financed by the state as a step toward the eventual abolition of private property. These workshops were visualized as cooperative enterprises with a trade-union type of administration. Employment was to be given to everyone in accordance with his abilities.

Backed by considerable popular support, Blanc became a member of the Provisional Government after the downfall of Louis-Philippe. After the elections for the assembly, the government apparently adopted his scheme of national workshops, but put it into effect in such a way as to ensure the defeat of its purpose. Paris was soon swamped with a mob which thought of easy money for little work and the government had one hundred thousand destitute people on its hands. Whereupon the shops were closed,

[1] P. J. Proudhon, *Philosophy of Poverty*, B. R. Tucker, Princeton, Mass., 1873, pp. 259ff.

[2] Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, International Publishers Co., Inc., New York, 1936.

and rebellion broke out, during which Blanc barely escaped with his life. Shortly thereafter he fled to England.

Both English and French theorists were far from being as radically revolutionary as the Germans Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895). These were the first socialists who advocated the overthrowing, by violent means if necessary, of the existing society in order to introduce a new economic and social order. The Marxian doctrine formed the ideological basis of the Revolutionary Russian Social Democratic party which later became the Russian Communist party of the Bolsheviks. It was Marxism which, from the latter part of the nineteenth century, was the dominant influence in socialism throughout the world. It is difficult to overestimate the tremendous impression of Marxism upon the twentieth-century world. Not only has it molded the ideology of the working class, not only has it provided one of the world's largest nations with a basic doctrine, but, in various forms and interpretations, it has unquestionably colored the viewpoint of the world at large.