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MARX ON RELIGION, REVOLUTION AND ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS

The C.P.S.U. has a long-standing tradition of "finding" historical documents with political significance at times convenient to the Politburo. Consequently it is interesting that Problems of History of the CPSU (No. 10, 1966) has published for the first time in the Russian language the full text of an interview given by Marx to the Chicago Tribune in 1878. The interview was published on 5th January 1879 by the Chicago Tribune, and a short part of it was reprinted in the same year by the Chicago daily The Socialist. In 1964 a part of The Socialist's text was published in E. Berlin by Zeitschrift fuer Geschichtswissenschaft, Year 12 Vol. I. An American bibliographer¹ then found the full text of the article, which was subsequently published in West Germany by Archiv fuer Sozialgeschichte, Hanover, No. 5, 1965.

The Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the C.C., CPSU, is apparently responsible for bringing the document to the attention of Soviet readers for the first time, because it has contributed a foreword to the interview which draws attention to its political importance today.

Topical are those passages in the interview in which Marx rejects the slanders directed against the socialists: the false charge that they participate in assassination and terrorism, the attempts to portray them as champions of violence and bloodshed, and to show the struggle of the working class as a movement inspired from abroad, from one centre.

1) Mr. L. Lazarus.

Using the example of the movement in Germany, the U.S. and other countries Marx showed that the growth of the organized class struggle of the proletariat is the inevitable consequence of the internal development of these countries, the result of the aggravation of the contradictions of capitalism. As can be seen from the statements made by Marx in the interview, the peaceful or non-peaceful nature of a revolution depends in his opinion not on the will or desire of the revolutionaries, but on the objective historic situation in each individual country.

From these excerpts it is evident that the Institute is hoping to use the document primarily for the Soviet campaign against the "thoughts of Mao Tse-tung," but the foreword adds that:

The ideas expressed by Marx concerning international links between various national detachments of the working-class movement, and concerning the attitude of a proletarian party towards religion, are also important.

On the latter score it is easy to agree with the Institute. In the text of the interview, the Tribune correspondent says:

Dr. Marx, you and your supporters are said to make all kinds of inflammatory speeches against religion. You, of course, would like the whole system to be destroyed, and utterly eradicated.

We know, Marx replied after brief reflection, that violent measures against religion are senseless; but our opinion is that religion will disappear² as socialism develops. Its disappearance should come about as a result of social development, in which a large part will be played by education.

What Marx had to say about the organizational control of the movement is also significant in that it closely coincides with the CPSU's present attitude to the direction of the pro-Soviet communist bloc.

2) Chicago Tribune's emphasis.

The correspondent asked:

Does your International Association in London guide the working-class movement?

Marx replied:

The International Association was useful in its day, but it is already outdated, and no longer exists. When it existed it did in fact guide the working-class movement, but in recent years the growth of socialism has been so tempestuous that its existence ceased to be necessary. Newspapers began to be published in various countries. There is a regular exchange of them, but this is almost the only link between the parties of the various countries. The International Association was created above all to rally the workers and prove to them the need for the establishment of an effective organization among their various national parties in various countries are not identical. And the spectre of the leaders of the International sitting in London is pure myth. It is true that we did send instructions to workers' associations in other countries at the time when the formation of the International was completed. We were forced to expel some New York sections, including those in which Mrs. Woodhall played a prominent part. That was in 1871. In America there are a number of politicians -- I shall not name them -- who wish to use the movement for their purposes. They are well known to American socialists.

The editors of Problems of History of the CPSU have helpfully attached a footnote to this passage explaining that Victoria Woodhall (1838-1927) was a "bourgeois feminist" who was expelled in 1872 together with her section (New York, No. 12) for agitating for "bourgeois reforms" and trying to impose her leadership on other American sections.

Peaceful versus Violent Roads to Revolution

On this subject the Tribune correspondent asked Marx:

In Mr. Joseph Cook's recent lecture he said: Karl Marx is now reported to have said that in the USA, Great Britain and possibly in France,

the reform of labor will be carried out without bloody revolution, but that in Germany, Russia, Italy and Austria bloodshed would occur.

One need not be a socialist, Dr. Marx replied laughing, to foresee the approaching bloody revolutions in Russia, Germany, Austria and perhaps also in Italy if the Italians continue to follow their policy. The events of the French Revolution may be repeated in these countries. This is obvious to everyone who is experienced in politics. However these revolutions will be carried out by the majority. No revolutions can be brought about by a party, revolution is brought about only by the people.³

It is no accident that this statement by Marx on how revolutions occur coincides precisely with the position taken by the CPSU in its controversy with the leaders of the C.C.P.

Organizational Ties

Similarly, his remarks on the organizational links in the world movement may well seem more apposite to Moscow now than in 1964, when an excerpt from the interview was published in E. Berlin. The Soviet Institute for Marxism-Leninism must have been aware of the full text at that time, but in those days it could have been a highly inconvenient document from Moscow's point of view. After all, it was precisely in E. Berlin that Yu.V. Andropov, on the 100th anniversary of the First International in September 1964 was demanding "collective resolutions and united action," criticizing "organizational conservatism in practice" as being not less damaging than "dogmatism in theory,"⁴ and generally attempting to tighten up organizational forms within the pro-Soviet bloc. Immediately afterwards Khrushchev was overthrown, and now after the lapse of two years, the Institute finds it convenient to publish Marx's views, which seem to add up to strong support for the "organizational conservatives" of the Togliatti-Longo and Georghiu-Dej-Ceausescu variety. Thus the Marx interview is not only of historical interest per se, but may also be an indication of the change in the Politburo's attitude on this question since the brinkmanship of 1964 was abandoned.

It is of course true to say that the text of the Marx interview can be said to "authorize" the expulsion of the detachments from a world-wide socialist organization by the mention of the exclusion of New York Section 12, under Mrs. Woodhall's "bourgeois reformist" leadership. But the reformists of today would surely be more inclined to stress

3) Chicago Tribune's emphasis.

4) See Neues Deutschland, 27 September 1964, also RFE Research report 29 September 1964 "Andropov on Proletarian Internationalism."

the fact that even in 1878 Dr. Marx pointed out that the International Association had already outlived its usefulness, and that "socialism" had already grown so widespread as to make the existence of such an organization no longer necessary.

It is precisely because, as Marx put it, "the interests of the individual socialist parties in various countries were not identical" that the First International only existed for eight years (1864-72).

Most of the British trade unions of the day objected strongly to the violence of the Paris Commune (the principles of which Marx and the First International claimed as identical to their own), while the Blanquists in France and the Lasalleans in Germany had never been a part of the organization. When the First International finally split in 1872 at the Hague Congress, the majority under Bakunin was able to found the Anarchist's International, whereas the Marxists had to emigrate to New York, where their minority gradually died of inanition in 1876.

Since in Soviet eyes Bakunin was the Mao Tse tung of the day (he was described in Pravda two years ago as being "adventurous," "pseudo-revolutionary," "dogmatic," "petty-bourgeois," and "subjectivist"), it is understandable that the First International is no longer considered a useful model. At least that is the strong impression that the reader derives from the republication by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of Dr. Marx's interview with the Chicago Tribune almost eighty-eight years ago.

Caution: Because the textual excerpts from the interview with the Tribune have been retranslated from the Russian for the purposes of this paper, the precise language used here is unlikely to conform in all respects to the original which is not at present available in English.

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