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Marxism and Modernization

The essay by Leszek Kołakowski on the fate of Marxism in the USSR and in the European countries that came under its dominant influence after World War II bears the stamp of a philosopher who combines a profound personal engagement in the debates on this subject in recent years with a point of view that is nourished by the European tradition of free inquiry which continues to be a part of the Polish intellectual heritage.

The spirit of his critique of Soviet Marxism has something of the flavor of Prince Kurbsky's letter to Ivan IV in 1564 from the safety of his self-exile in Poland, in which he told his former master that "because of the bitterest persecution from your power, with much sorrow in my heart will I hasten to inform you of a few things."¹ One can also imagine Stalin or a successor responding in terms similar to those of Ivan IV, who reminded Kurbsky of the misfortunes that are likely to befall tsars who heed counsels of compromise: "Is this what you advise us—namely to come to such destruction? And is this piety, not to organize one's kingdom and not to hold in check evil-doing men and to abandon it to destruction by foreign races? Or do you say that such is your interpretation of the sacred teachings? . . . It is one thing to save one's own soul, but it is another to have the care of many souls and bodies. . . . Spiritual authority is one thing—the rule of a tsar is another."²

Kołakowski's account of the ossifying effects on most branches of thought of the ideological controls imposed during the period of the earlier Five-Year Plans is harsh but certainly not overdrawn. There can be no question that a dominant trend of Soviet writing in the social sciences in recent years has been the defense of the tenets of Marxism-Leninism against possible inroads from contemporary European and American social thought, and numerous books have been compiled with the purpose of unmasking "bourgeois falsifications" in various relevant fields. A particular target of these attacks is referred to in Soviet writing as "the theory of the single industrial society" (*teoriia edinogo industrial'nogo obshchestva*), or more simply as "the industrial society."

It seems clear that this target has been chosen because the idea of a *single* industrial society—the view that the process of industrialization tends to have the same social effects in all societies—is seen as a direct challenge to the Marxist-Leninist conception of *two* types of industrializing societies, capitalist

1. *The Correspondence Between Prince A. M. Kurbsky and Tsar Ivan IV of Russia, 1564–1579*, edited with a translation and notes by J. L. I. Fennell (Cambridge, Eng., 1955), p. 3. The translation here and in the next quotation varies slightly from Fennell's.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 57, 59.

and socialist. The Soviet critics of this view cite Raymond Aron as its original proponent, and they note in particular that he considers the question of private or public ownership of the means of production relatively unimportant compared with such phenomena as urbanization, changes in social stratification, and the integration of decision-making, which affect capitalist and socialist societies alike.

Although the term "industrial society" was taken initially from Aron's writings, the "bourgeois" writers cited by the Soviet critics include other Europeans, such as Jacques Ellul, Jean Fourastié, and Herbert Marcuse, and numerous American social scientists, including Daniel Bell, John Kenneth Galbraith, Wilbert E. Moore, Seymour M. Lipset, and Walter W. Rostow. The Soviet critics write as though they find it difficult to believe that social scientists could have a serious scholarly interest in the common characteristics of modernizing societies, and maintain in effect that this substantial and rapidly growing body of literature is devoted primarily to undermining Marxism-Leninism by seeking a non-Marxist framework for the economic basis of social change. The subtitle of Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* provides a convenient springboard for such a plot theory, although most of the European and American social scientists under attack are not particularly familiar with current trends in Marxist-Leninist theory and have not been especially interested in engaging in a polemic about it.

The response of these Soviet theorists is to assert in a dogmatic fashion the inevitability of the transition from capitalism to socialism and to interpret the social impact of industrialization within a Marxist framework. In countries that are already "socialist," according to this view, industrialization increases the capacity of society to achieve the goals of communism. In countries that are still "capitalist," industrialization has the effect of exploding existing institutions and of preparing the way for the transition to socialism and communism. What is particularly notable in this body of Soviet theoretical writing is its dogmatic quality and the absence of a scholarly approach to the comparison of economic and social change in the USSR and other industrializing societies.³

This effort to maintain a sharp distinction between an interpretation of economic and social change based on Marx's theory of class struggle and other interpretations—especially those that seek to identify the functional characteristics common to all industrializing societies and to describe how they interact with traditional institutions to produce new forms of modern society—

3. The following works are representative examples of the rather substantial literature on this subject: M. B. Mitin and V. S. Semenov, "Dvizhenie chelovechestva k kommunizmu i burzhuaznaia kontseptsia 'edinogo industrial'nogo obshchestva,'" *Voprosy filosofii*, 1965, no. 5, pp. 35–46; S. Dalin, "Teorii 'industrial'nogo obshchestva,'" *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, 1969, no. 10, pp. 12–23, and no. 11, pp. 33–46; and G. P. Davidiuk, *Kritika teorii "edinogo industrial'nogo obshchestva"* (Minsk, 1968):

is not, however, the only theme present in published Soviet social thought. Kołakowski may well be overdramatizing the dilemma of Marxism in the USSR and the countries under its ideological control when he defines it as one involving the alternatives of rigidity or disintegration. Although both of these extreme alternatives are doubtless within the realm of possibility, the intermediate alternatives of varying degrees of accommodation are probably more realistic and offer an interesting field for speculation. Even a cursory acquaintance with social thought in the countries that officially follow the Marxist-Leninist ideology provides evidence of considerable concern with themes other than the ones usually regarded as central to Marxism.

It is worth noting in this connection that the same issues of *Voprosy filozofii* that launch attacks on "the single industrial society" in articles indexed under "Contemporary Philosophy and Sociology Abroad" also publish articles of scholarly merit. These articles are listed, significantly, under "Dialectical Materialism" and "Historical Materialism and the Methodology of Concrete Social Research," and sometimes include only brief references to Lenin and none to Marx. This and other scholarly journals in the humanities and social sciences offer their readers discussions of such subjects as linguistics and semiotics, cybernetics, the use of survey methods in the social sciences, philosophical aspects of game theory, urbanization in the developing countries, economic programming, model-building and forecasting, and the need to improve the quality of research in the social sciences.

Many of these articles are critical of European and American scholarship, but the criticism is usually on scholarly rather than doctrinal grounds. Indeed, a significant feature of such writing is that in the course of discussing problems of contemporary social science, even when the tone is critical (as is the case more often than not), a good part of the article is devoted to presenting the views under consideration. Regardless of whether this is the purpose of these articles, the effect is to keep the readers up to date with the latest developments in "bourgeois science." A similar function is performed by what is written in Soviet journals by and about social scientists from the neighboring Marxist countries such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary, where the social sciences are well developed and where scholars are in closer touch with West European and American thinking than their Soviet colleagues are. Scholars in these countries who are in good standing with their national Communist parties frequently serve to bridge the ideological gap. To the extent that they are ideologically trustworthy, they can serve to legitimize theories and methods that Soviet scholars would not be able to express so explicitly.

Scholars in the USSR and in neighboring European countries have in recent years gone substantially beyond general discussion of contemporary trends abroad in the social sciences and have begun to apply them to concrete problems within their own countries. Much has been written about the new school of Marxist-Leninist sociology, and a significant body of scholarship in

the social sciences is being produced in these countries.⁴ There is still a strong tendency to divide the world into two relatively watertight compartments—"socialist" and "capitalist." Scholars in the "socialist" sector apply the new techniques of social science research to their own problems, but they often regard their use of these techniques to be of a different order from the use they are put to in countries of the theoretically outdated "capitalist" world.

This view is not generally binding, however, and the interdisciplinary council established by the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1961 to study "The Economic Competition Between the Two Systems and the Less Developed Countries" leaned much more toward scholarship than dogma.⁵ More significant yet is the participation of these countries in various projects carried out under the auspices of the European Coordination Center for Research and Documentation in the Social Sciences, located in Vienna under the sponsorship of the International Social Science Council. One study in particular, on how people budget their time in fifteen urban-industrial sites in thirteen countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Federal Republic of Germany, France, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Peru, Poland, the USSR, the United States, and Yugoslavia) was successful both as an exercise in "East-West" cooperation and in the application of uniform research methods, and demonstrated the extent to which research on common concrete problems can overcome national and ideological barriers.⁶

There is now very considerable leeway in these countries for objective research in the social sciences. Novotný is often alleged to have represented a "Stalinist" policy in Czechoslovakia, but under his regime the Academy of Sciences published a comprehensive study of the dilemmas confronting industrial societies that would have brought credit to a West European or American research institute.⁷ It would go far beyond the scope of these comments to note the very considerable number of scholarly books and articles in the humanities and social sciences that are published each year in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Rumania, as well as in the USSR,

4. George Fischer, ed., *Science and Ideology in Soviet Society* (New York, 1947) provides a valuable introduction to this literature. Recent examples of the application of contemporary social science methods to Soviet problems are Ts. A. Stepanian and V. S. Semenov, eds., *Problemy izmeneniia sotsial'noi struktury sovetskogo obshchestva* (Moscow, 1968), and S. A. Kugel, "Izmenenie sotsial'noi struktury sotsialisticheskogo obshchestva pod vozdeistviem nauchnotekhnicheskoi revoliutsii," *Voprosy filosofii*, 1969, no. 3, pp. 13–22.

5. The first two volumes published by this council are *Sorevnovanie dvukh sistem: Problemy ekonomicheskoi nauki* (Moscow, 1963) and *Sorevnovanie dvukh sistem: Ekonomicheskoe sopostavleniia* (Moscow, 1965).

6. See the annual reports of the European Coordination Center, and also Alexander Szalai, "The Multinational Time Budget Research Project: A Venture in International Research Cooperation," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 10 (December 1966): 1–31.

7. Radovan Richta and others, *Civilizace na rozcesti: Společenské a lidské souvislosti vědeckotechnické revoluce* (Prague, 1st ed. 1964, 3rd ed. 1969). An English translation is now available: *Civilization at the Crossroads: Social and Human Implications of the Scientific and Technological Revolution* (New York, 1969).

that would be of interest to scholars in other countries, and it is a matter of regret that so few of them are translated into English, French, or German.

One's reaction to these developments depends a great deal on one's attitude toward Marxism. Kołakowski, as a scholar who is concerned primarily with the history of philosophical thought and who places a high value on the correct interpretation of Marx's ideas, no doubt has good reason to find current developments quite dispiriting in the countries whose policies are inspired by Marxist principles. Those who see Marx primarily as an important early contributor to our understanding of the transformation of societies in modern times, however, need not be so discouraged. Marx had an unusually keen perception of what was going on around him. Nevertheless, the terms in which he expressed himself are so general, and both the character of the economic and social transformation and our understanding of it have changed so much in the past century, that it is possible to carry out quite a wide range of policies within the framework of a Marxist rhetoric.

Kołakowski notes that there has been a generational change in the outlook of intellectuals, and this observation deserves more emphasis than he places on it. The generation that gained power after the Second World War thought primarily in defensive terms—how to preserve and sustain an ideology that had survived a devastating conflict and that in an intellectual sense was challenged much more by European and American thought than it ever had been by fascism. The generation that is now coming of age does not have a strong personal sense of the conflicts of the 1940s, and is much more concerned with modernization than with ideology. Its members are interested in the reality of the scientific-technical revolution and its applications to concrete social problems, and for them Marxism-Leninism represents a general theory of development that does not preclude the necessity for objective scholarship in the social sciences and humanities. Indeed, the point has been authoritatively advanced that theory must be more closely related to life, and that Marxist-Leninist philosophy needs to be strengthened by case studies in sociology.⁸

To say this is not to say that the ideological gap has been either eliminated or bridged. It is to say rather that there is today an important area of accommodation within which scholars from countries adhering to a considerable range of ideologies can work together toward the solution of problems common to industrializing societies. Cooperative scholarly research can now be undertaken on the principal problems of concern to mankind without necessarily threatening the tenets of Marxism-Leninism any more than those of liberals concerned with the preservation of democratic values.

8. D. M. Gvishiani, "Istoricheskii materializm i chastnye sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia," *Voprosy filosofii*, 1965, no. 5, pp. 47–56; and A. M. Rumiantsev and G. V. Osipov, "Marksistka sotsiologiia i konkretne sotsial'nye issledovaniia," *Voprosy filosofii*, 1968, no. 6, pp. 3–13.