

V.I. LENIN

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WHAT THE  
"FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE"  
ARE AND HOW THEY FIGHT  
THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATS



WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

V. I. L E N I N

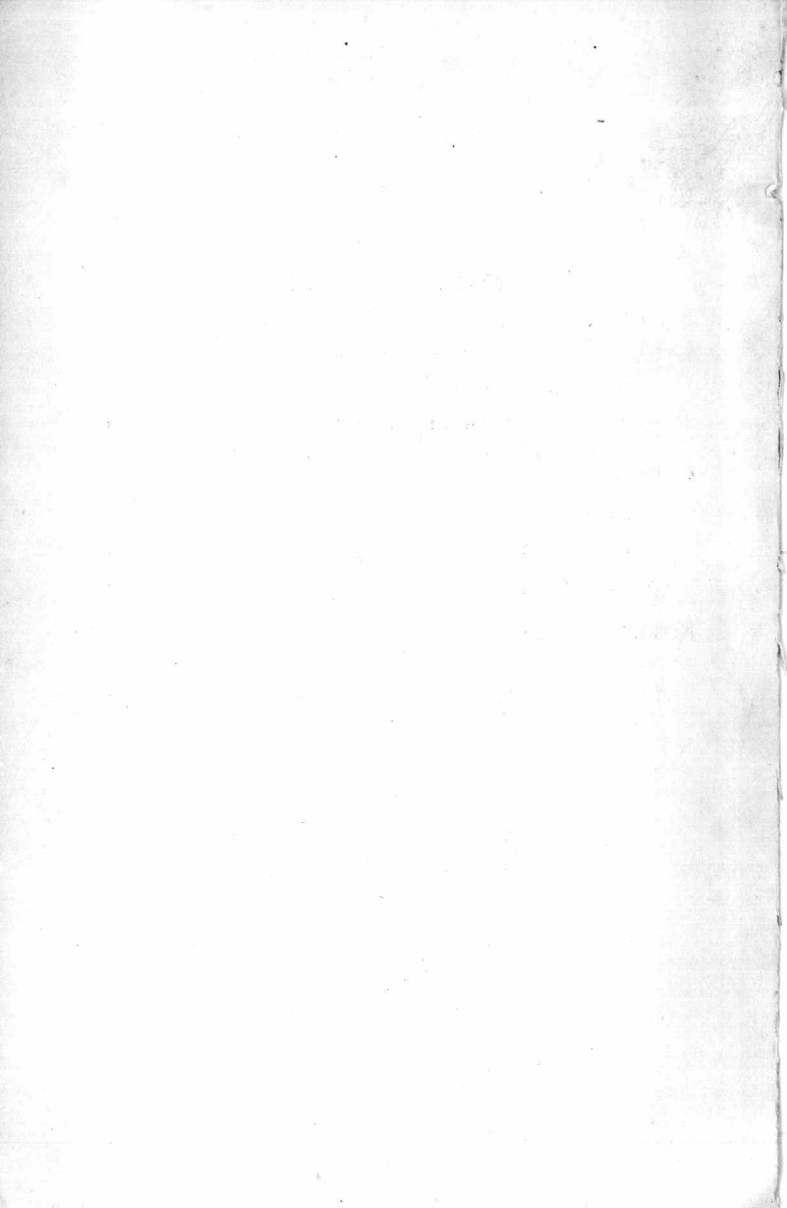
WHAT THE  
“FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE”  
ARE AND HOW THEY FIGHT  
THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATS

A Reply to Articles  
in the *Russkoye Bogatstvo*  
Opposing the Marxists<sup>1</sup>



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

Moscow 1950



## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

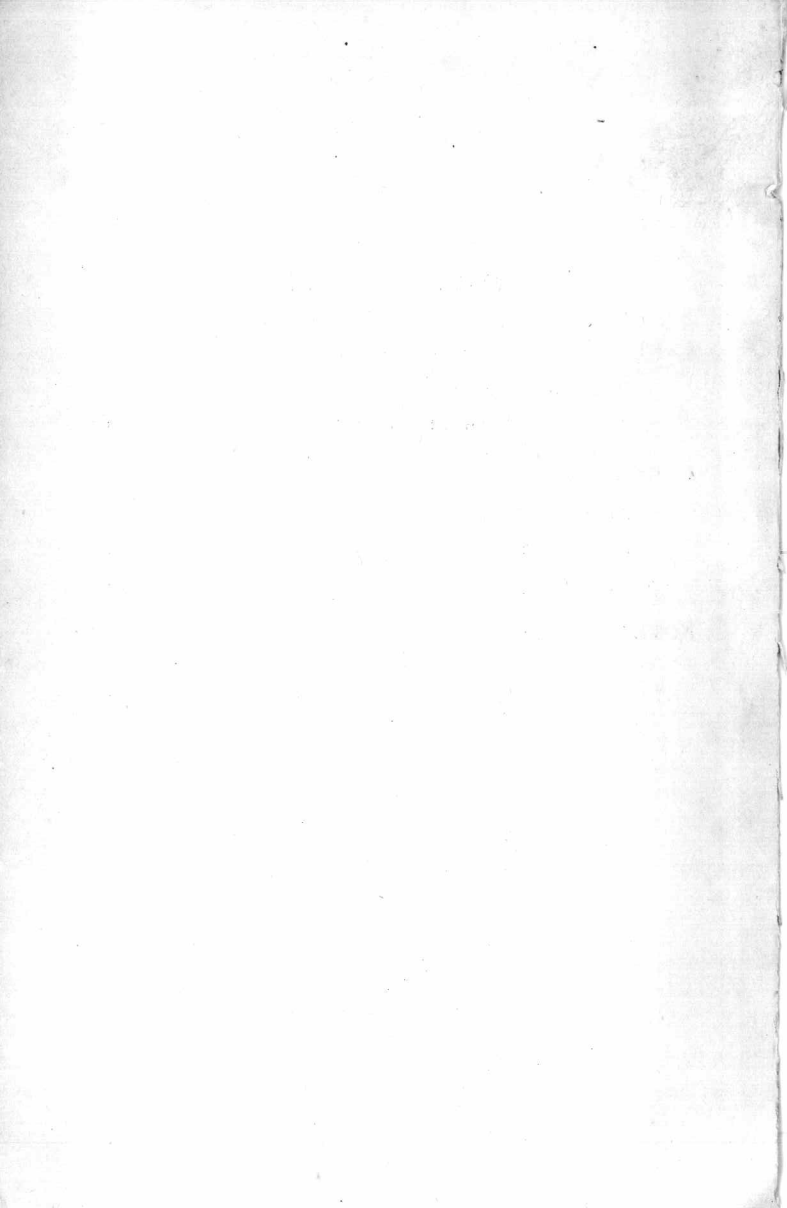
This translation of V. I. Lenin's *What the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats* has been made from the text given in the *Collected Works* of V. I. Lenin, Vol. 1, Fourth Russian Edition, prepared by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute (Gospolitizdat, Moscow 1941).

*Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*



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# PART I



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The *Russkoye Bogatstvo*<sup>2</sup> has launched a campaign against the Social-Democrats. Last year, in issue No. 10, one of the leading lights of this magazine, Mr. N. Mikhailovsky, announced a forthcoming "polemic" against "our so-called Marxists, or Social-Democrats." Then followed an article by Mr. S. Krivenko entitled "Our Cultural Freelances" (in No. 12), and one by Mr. N. Mikhailovsky entitled "Literature and Life" (*Russkoye Bogatstvo*, 1894, Nos. 1 and 2). As to the magazine's own views on our economic realities, these have been most fully expounded by Mr. S. Yuzhakov in an article entitled "Problems of the Economic Development of Russia" (in Nos. 11 and 12). While in general claiming to present in their magazine the ideas and tactics of the true "friends of the people," these gentlemen are archenemies of the Social-Democrats. So let us examine these "friends of the people," their criticism of Marxism, their ideas and their tactics.

Mr. N. Mikhailovsky devotes his attention chiefly to the theoretical principles of Marxism and therefore specially stops to examine the mate-

rialist conception of history. After giving a general outline of the contents of the voluminous Marxist literature that enunciates this doctrine, Mr. Mikhailovsky launches into his criticism with the following tirade:

“First of all,” he says, “the question naturally arises: in which of his works did Marx set forth his materialist conception of history? In *Capital* he gave us an example of the combination of logical power with erudition and a painstaking investigation of all the economic literature as well as of the pertinent facts. He brought to light again theoreticians of economic science who had been long forgotten or who are not known to anybody today, and did not overlook the most minute details in the reports of factory inspectors or the evidence given by experts before various special commissions; in a word, he overhauled an overwhelming amount of factual material, partly in order to provide arguments for, and partly to illustrate, his economic theories. If he has created a ‘completely new’ conception of the historical process, if he has explained the whole past of mankind from a new point of view and has summarized all philosophico-historical theories that have hitherto existed, then he must of course have done so with equal thoroughness: must indeed have reviewed and subjected to critical analysis all the known theories of the historical process and analyzed a mass of facts of world history. The comparison with Darwin, so customary in Marxist literature, serves still more to confirm this idea. What does Darwin’s whole work amount to? Certain closely interconnected generalizing ideas

crowning a veritable Mont Blanc of factual material. But where is the corresponding work by Marx? It does not exist. And not only does no such work by Marx exist, but there is none to be found in all Marxist literature, in spite of its voluminousness and extensiveness."

This whole tirade is highly characteristic and helps us to understand how little the public understands *Capital* and Marx. Overwhelmed by the vast weight and cogency of the exposition, they bow and scrape before Marx, laud him, and at the same time entirely lose sight of the basic content of his doctrine and blithely continue to chant the old songs of "subjective sociology." In this connection one cannot help recalling the pointed epigraph Kautsky selected for his book on the economic teachings of Marx:

*Wer wird nicht einen Klopstock loben?  
Doch wird ihn jeder lesen? Nein.  
Wir wollen weniger erhoben,  
Und fleissiger gelesen sein!\**

Just so! Mr. Mikhailovsky should praise Marx less and read him more diligently, or, better still, put a little more thought into what he is reading.

"In *Capital* Marx gave us an example of the combination of logical power with erudition," says Mr. Mikhailovsky. In this phrase Mr. Mikhailovsky

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\* Who would not praise a Klopstock? But will everybody read him? No. We would like to be exalted less, but read more diligently. (*Lessing.*)—*Tr.*

has given us a model of brilliant phrasemongering combined with absence of meaning—a certain Marxist observed. And the observation is an entirely just one. For, indeed, how did this logical power of Marx's manifest itself. What were its effects? Reading Mr. Mikhailovsky's tirade just quoted, one might think that this power was entirely concentrated on "economic theories," in the narrowest sense of the term—and nothing more. And in order still further to emphasize the narrow limits of the field in which Marx displayed his logical power, Mr. Mikhailovsky lays stress on the "most minute details," on the "painstakingness," on the "theoreticians who are not known to anybody," and so forth. It would thus appear that Marx contributed nothing essentially new or noteworthy to the methods of constructing these theories, that he left the limits of economic science just as they had been with the earlier economists, not extending them and not contributing a "completely new" conception of the science itself. Yet anybody who has read *Capital* knows that this is absolutely untrue. In this connection one cannot refrain from recalling what Mr. Mikhailovsky wrote about Marx sixteen years ago when arguing with that vulgar bourgeois, Mr. Y. Zhukovsky.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the times were different, perhaps sentiments were fresher—at any rate, the tone and content of Mr. Mikhailovsky's article was then entirely different.

"... It is the ultimate aim of this work, to lay bare the law of development (in the original: das oekonomische Bewegungsgesetz—the economic law of motion) of modern society,' Karl Marx said in

reference to his *Capital*, and he adhered to this program with strict consistency." This is what Mr. Mikhailovsky said in 1877. Let us more closely examine this program, which—as the critic admits—has been adhered to with strict consistency. It is "to lay bare the economic law of development of modern society."

The very formulation confronts us with several questions that require elucidation. Why does Marx speak of "modern" society, when all the economists who preceded him spoke of society in general? In what sense does he use the word "modern," by what tokens does he distinguish this modern society? And further, what is meant by the economic law of motion of society? We are accustomed to hear from economists—and this, by the way, is one of the favourite ideas of the publicists and economists of the milieu to which the *Russkoye Bogatstvo* belongs—that only the production of values is subject solely to economic laws, whereas distribution, they declare, depends on politics, on the nature of the influence exercised on society by the government, the intelligentsia, and so forth. In what sense, then, does Marx speak of the economic law of motion of society, even referring to this law as a *Naturgesetz*—a law of nature? How is this to be understood, when so many of our native sociologists have covered reams of paper with asseverations to the effect that the sphere of social phenomena is distinct from the sphere of the phenomena of natural history, and that therefore an absolutely distinct "subjective method in sociology" must be applied in the investigation of the former?

These perplexities arise naturally and necessarily, and, of course, one must be utterly ignorant to evade them when dealing with *Capital*. To elucidate these questions, we shall first quote one more passage from the Preface to *Capital*—only a few lines lower down:

"[From] my standpoint," says Marx, "the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history."<sup>4</sup>

One has merely to compare, say, the two passages just quoted from the Preface in order to see that this is precisely the basic idea of *Capital*, which, as we have heard, is pursued with strict consistency and with rare logical power. In connection with all this, let us first note two circumstances: Marx speaks only of one "economic formation of society," the capitalist formation; that is, he says that he investigated the law of development of this formation only and of no other. That, in the first place. And in the second place, let us note the methods Marx used in working out his deductions. These methods consisted, as we have just heard from Mr. Mikhailovsky, in a "painstaking investigation of the pertinent facts."

Let us now proceed to examine this basic idea of *Capital*, which our subjective philosopher so adroitly tried to evade. In what, properly speaking, does the concept economic formation of society consist, and in what sense can and must the development of such a formation be regarded as a process of natural history?—such are the questions that now confront us. I have already pointed out that from the standpoint of the old economists and sociologists (not

old for Russia), the concept economic formation of society is entirely superfluous: they talk of society in general, they argue with Spencer and his like about the nature of society in general, about the aims and essence of society in general, and so forth. In their reasonings, these subjective sociologists rely on such arguments as that the aim of society is to benefit all its members, that therefore justice demands such and such an organization, and that a system that is out of harmony with this ideal organization ("Sociology must start with a utopia"—these words of one of the authors of the subjective method, Mr. Mikhailovsky, are eminently characteristic of the essence of their methods) is abnormal and should be set aside. "The essential task of sociology," Mr. Mikhailovsky, for instance, argues, "is to ascertain the social conditions under which any particular requirement of human nature is satisfied." As you see, this sociologist is interested only in a society that satisfies human nature, and is not at all interested in some forms of society, which, moreover, may be based on phenomena so out of harmony with "human nature," as the enslavement of the majority by the minority. You also see that from the standpoint of this sociologist the idea of regarding the development of society as a process of natural history is totally out of the question. ("Having recognized something to be desirable or undesirable, the sociologist must discover the conditions whereby the desirable can be realized, or the undesirable eliminated"—"whereby such and such ideals can be realized"—this same Mr. Mikhailovsky reasons.) This is not all: development



is also out of the question; there can be only deviations from the "desirable," "defects" that may have occurred in history as a result . . . as a result of the fact that people were not clever enough, did not properly understand what human nature demands, were unable to discover the conditions required for the realization of such a rational system. It is obvious that Marx's basic idea that the development of the economic formations of society is a process of natural history cuts at the very root of this childish morality which lays claim to the title of sociology. By what method did Marx arrive at this basic idea? He arrived at it by singling out from the various spheres of social life the economic sphere, by singling out from all social relations the *relations of production*, as being the basic and primary relations that determine all other relations. Marx himself has described the course of his reasoning on this question as follows:

"The first work which I undertook for a solution of the doubts which assailed me was a critical review of the Hegelian philosophy of law. . . . My investigation led to the result that legal relations as well as forms of state, are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called general development of the human mind, but rather have their roots in the material conditions of life, the sum total of which Hegel, following the example of the Englishmen and Frenchmen of the eighteenth century, combines under the name of 'civil society,' that however the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy. . . . The general result at which I arrived . . . can be briefly formulated as follows: In the social production of their life men