

**V. I. LENIN**

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

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

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS  
P E K I N G

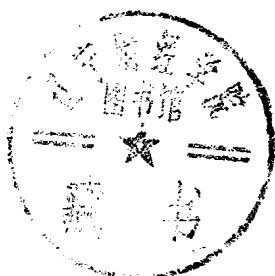
First Edition 1978

### *PUBLISHER'S NOTE*

The present English edition of V. I. Lenin's *What the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats* is based on existing translations, with necessary revisions after checking with the original Russian text. The notes at the back are based, with some amendments, on those given in Lenin's *Collected Works*, Chinese edition, Vol. I, published by the People's Publishing House, Peking, in December 1955.

*Printed in the People's Republic of China*

**WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!**



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## PART I



**R**USSKOYE *Bogatstvo*<sup>2</sup> has launched a campaign against the Social-Democrats. Last year, in issue No. 10, one of the chiefs of this magazine, Mr. N. Mikhailovsky, announced a forthcoming "polemic" against "our so-called Marxists, or Social-Democrats." Then followed Mr. S. Krivenko's article "Our Cultural Free Lances" (No. 12), and Mr. N. Mikhailovsky's "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 the article "Problems of Russia's Economic Development" (in Nos. 11 and 12). While in general claiming to present the ideas and tactics of true "friends of the people" in their magazine, these gentlemen are arch-enemies of Social-Democracy. So let us take a closer look at these "friends of the people," their criticism of Marxism, their ideas and their tactics.

Mr. N. Mikhailovsky devotes his attention chiefly to the theoretical foundations of Marxism and therefore makes a special analysis of the materialist conception of history. After outlining in general the contents of the voluminous Marxist literature enunciating this doctrine, Mr. Mikhailovsky opens his criticism with the following tirade:



"First of all," he says, "the question naturally arises: In which of his works did Marx expound his materialist conception of history? In *Capital* he gave us an example of the combination of logical force with erudition, with a scrupulous investigation of all economic literature and of the pertinent facts. He brought to light theoreticians of economic science long forgotten or unknown to anybody today, and did not overlook the most minute details in factory inspectors' reports or experts' evidence before various special commissions; in a word, he dug through an enormous mass of factual material, partly in order to provide arguments for his economic theories and partly to illustrate them. If he has created a 'completely new' conception of the historical process, if he has explained the whole past of mankind from a new viewpoint and has summarized all hitherto existing philosophico-historical theories, then he has of course, with equal thoroughness, reviewed and subjected to critical analysis all the known theories of the historical process, and worked over 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? There isn't one. And not only is there no such work by Marx but there is none in all Marxist literature despite its voluminous and extensive character."

The whole tirade is highly characteristic and helps us to understand how little the public understand *Capital* and Marx. Overwhelmed by the tremendously convincing way he states his case, they bow and scrape before Marx, praise him, and at the same time entirely lose sight of the basic content of his doctrine and quite calmly continue to sing the old

songs of "subjective sociology." In this connection one cannot help recalling the very apt 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 erheben,  
Und fleissiger gelesen sein!\**

Just so! Mr. Mikhailovsky should praise Marx less and read him more diligently, or, better still, give more serious thought to what he is reading.

"In *Capital* Marx gave us an example of the combination of logical force with erudition," says Mr. Mikhailovsky. In this phrase Mr. Mikhailovsky has given us a model of brilliant phrase-mongering combined with absence of meaning — a certain Marxist observed. And the observation is entirely just. How, indeed, did this logical force of Marx's manifest itself? What results did it produce? Reading the above tirade by Mr. Mikhailovsky, one might think that this force was concentrated entirely on "economic theories," in the narrowest sense of the term — and nothing more. And in order to emphasize still further the narrow limits of the field in which Marx manifested the force of his logic, Mr. Mikhailovsky lays stress on the "most minute details," on "scrupulosity," on "theoreticians unknown to anybody" and so forth. It would appear that Marx contributed nothing essentially new or noteworthy to the methods of constructing these theories, that he left the bounds of economic science where

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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). — *Ed.*

the earlier economists had them, without extending them, without contributing a "completely new" conception of the science itself. Yet anybody who has read *Capital* knows this to be completely untrue. In this connection one cannot but recall 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, both the tone and the content of Mr. Mikhailovsky's article were 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 says of his *Capital*, and he adheres strictly to this programme." This is what Mr. Mikhailovsky said in 1877. Let us examine more closely this programme, which — as the critic admits — has been strictly adhered to. It is "to lay bare the economic law of development of modern society."<sup>4</sup>

The very formulation confronts us with several questions that require explanation. 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 features 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 to solely 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 are we to understand this, when so many of our sociologist compatriots have covered reams of paper to show that social phenomena are particularly distinct from the phenomena of natural history, and that therefore the investigation of the former requires the employment of an absolutely distinct “subjective method in sociology”?

All these perplexities arise naturally and necessarily, and, of course, only an absolute ignoramus would evade them when speaking of *Capital*. To elucidate these questions, we shall first quote one more passage from the same 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>

It will be sufficient to compare, say, the two passages just quoted from the Preface in order to see that it is here that we have the basic idea of *Capital*, pursued, as we have heard, with strict consistency and with rare logical force. First let us note two circumstances regarding all this: Marx speaks of one “economic formation of society” only, the capitalist formation, that is, he says that he investigated the law of development of this formation only and of no other. That is the first. And secondly, 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 “scrupulous investigation of the pertinent facts.”

Now let us go on to analyse this basic idea of *Capital*, which our subjective philosopher so adroitly tried to evade. In what, properly speaking, does the concept of the 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 (not old for Russia) economists and sociologists, the concept of the economic formation of society is entirely superfluous: they talk of society in general, they argue with the Spencers about the nature of society in general, about the aim and essence of society in general, and so forth. In their reasonings, these subjective sociologists rely on arguments such as — the aim of society is to benefit all its members, that justice, therefore, demands such and such an organization, and that a system that does not correspond to this ideal organization ("Sociology must start with some utopia" — these words by Mr. Mikhailovsky, one of the authors of the subjective method, splendidly typify 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, what interests this sociologist is only a society that satisfies human nature, and not at all some sort of formations of society, which, moreover, may be based on a phenomenon 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 there can be no question of regarding the development of society as a process of natural history. ("Having recognized something as desirable or undesirable, the sociologist must discover the conditions under which the desirable can be realized, or the undesirable eliminated" — "under which such and such ideals can be realized" — this same Mr. Mikhailovsky reasons.) What is more, there can be no talk even of development, but

only of various deviations from the "desirable," of "defects" that have occurred in history as a result . . . as a result of the fact that people were not clever enough, were unable properly to understand what human nature demands, were unable to discover the conditions for the realization of such a rational system. It is obvious that Marx's basic idea that the development of the social-economic formations 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 means did Marx arrive at this basic idea? He did so by singling out the economic sphere from the various spheres of social life, by singling out *production relations* from all social relations as being basic, primary, determining all other relations. Marx himself has described the course of his reasoning on this question as follows:

"The first work I undertook to dispel the doubts assailing me was a critical review of the Hegelian philosophy of right. . . . My inquiry led to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor forms of state could be grasped whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but on the contrary they have their origin in the material conditions of existence, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of the Englishmen and Frenchmen of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term 'civil society'; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy. . . . The general conclusion at which I arrived . . . can be summarized as follows. In the social production of their existence, men enter into definite, necessary relations . . . relations of production corresponding to a determinate stage of development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of

society, the real foundation on which there arises a legal and political superstructure and to which there correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life-process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary it is their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or — what is merely a legal expression for the same thing — with the property relations within the framework of which they have hitherto operated. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. At that point an era of social revolution begins. With the change in the economic foundation the whole immense superstructure is more slowly or more rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic, in short, ideological, forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such an epoch of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of production. . . . In broad outline, the Asian, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as progressive epochs of the socio-economic order.”<sup>5</sup>

This idea of materialism in sociology was in itself a stroke of genius. Naturally, *for the time being* it was only a hypothesis, but one which for the first time created the possibility of a strictly scientific approach to historical and social problems. Hitherto, not knowing how to get down to the simplest primary relations such as the relations of production, the sociologists undertook the direct investigation and study of political and legal forms, stumbled on the fact that these forms emerge from certain of mankind's ideas in a given period — and there they stopped; it appeared as if social relations are consciously established by men. But this conclusion, fully expressed in the idea of the *Contrat Social*<sup>6</sup> (traces of which are very noticeable in all systems of utopian socialism), was in complete contradiction to all historical observations. It never has been the case, nor is it so now, that the members of society conceive the sum total of the social relations in which they live as something definite, integral, pervaded by some principle; on the contrary, the mass of people adapt themselves to these relations unconsciously, and have so little conception of them as specific historical social relations that, for instance, an explanation of the exchange relations under which people have lived for centuries was found only in very recent times. Materialism removed this contradiction by carrying the analysis deeper, to the origin of man's social ideas themselves; and its conclusion that the course of ideas depends on the course of things is the only one compatible with scientific psychology. Further, and from yet another aspect, this hypothesis was the first to elevate sociology to the level of a science. Hitherto, sociologists had found it difficult to distinguish the important and the unimportant in the complex network of social phenomena (that is the root of subjectivism in sociology) and



had been unable to discover any objective criterion for such a demarcation. Materialism provided an absolutely objective criterion by singling out *production relations* as the structure of society, and by making it possible to apply to these relations that general scientific criterion of recurrence whose applicability to sociology the subjectivists denied. So long as they confined themselves to ideological social relations (i.e., those which before taking shape, pass through man's consciousness\*) they were unable to note the recurrence and regularity in the social phenomena of the various countries, and their science was at best only a description of these phenomena, a collection of raw material. The analysis of material social relations (i.e., of those that take shape without passing through man's consciousness: when exchanging products men enter into production relations without even realizing that there is a social relation of production here) — the analysis of material social relations at once made it possible to note the recurrence and regularity and to generalize the systems of the various countries in the single fundamental concept: *social formation*. It was this generalization alone that made it possible to proceed from the description of social phenomena (and their evaluation from the standpoint of an ideal) to their strictly scientific analysis, which excludes, let us say by way of example, that which distinguishes one capitalist country from another and investigates that which is common to all of them.

Thirdly, and finally, another reason why this hypothesis for the first time made a *scientific* sociology possible was that only the reduction of social relations to production relations

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\* We are, of course, referring all the time to the consciousness of *social* relations and no others.