

MILOVAN DJILAS

THE NEW CLASS

**AN ANALYSIS
OF THE
COMMUNIST
SYSTEM**

A Harvest/HBJ Book

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COMMUNIST SYSTEM

by
Milovan Djilas



A Harvest/HBJ Book
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B C D E

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Wartime

Preface

All this could be told in a different way: as the history of a contemporary revolution, as the expression of a set of opinions, or finally, as the confession of a revolutionary. A little of each of these may be found in this document. But, even if this is an inadequate synthesis of history, opinions and memoirs, it reflects my effort to give as complete and as brief a picture as possible of contemporary Communism. Some special or technical aspects may be lost, but the larger picture, I trust, will be that much simpler and more complete.

I have tried to detach myself from my personal problems by not submitting to them. My circumstances are, at best, uncertain and I am therefore compelled to express my personal observations and experiences hastily; a more detailed examination of my personal situation might some day supplement and perhaps even change some of my conclusions.

I cannot describe all the dimensions of the conflict in the painful course of our contemporary world. Nor do I pretend to know any world outside the Communist world, in which I had either the fortune or misfortune to live. When I speak of a world outside my own, I do so only to put my own world in perspective, to make its reality clearer.

Almost everything in this book has been expressed somewhere else, and in a different way. Perhaps a new flavor, color, and mood, and some new thoughts, may be found here. That is something—in fact, quite enough. Each man's experiences are unique, worthy of communication to his fellow men.

The reader should not seek in this book some kind of social or other philosophy, not even where I make generalized statements. My aim has been to present a picture of the Communist world but not to philosophize about it by means of generalizations—even though I have sometimes found generalization unavoidable.

The method of detached observation seemed to me the most suitable one for presenting my material. My premises could have been strengthened and my conclusions could have been proved by quotations, statistics, and recitals of events. In order to be as simple and concise as possible, I have instead expressed my observations through reasoning and logical deduction, keeping quotations and statistics to a minimum.

I think my method is appropriate for my personal story and for my method of working and thinking.

During my adult life I have traveled the entire road open to a Communist: from the lowest to the highest rung of the hierarchical ladder, from local and national to international forums, and from the formation of the true Communist Party and organization of the revolution to the establishment of the so-called socialist society. No one compelled me to embrace or to reject Communism. I made my own decision according to my convictions, freely, in so far as a man can be free. Even though I was disillusioned, I do not belong to those whose disillusionment was sharp and extreme. I cut myself off gradually and consciously, building up the picture and conclusions I present in this book. As I became increasingly estranged from the reality of contemporary Communism, I came closer to the idea of democratic socialism. This personal evolution is also reflected

in this book, although the book's primary purpose is not to trace this evolution.

I consider it superfluous to criticize Communism as an idea. The ideas of equality and brotherhood among men, which have existed in varying forms since human society began—and which contemporary Communism accepts in word—are principles to which fighters for progress and freedom will always aspire. It would be wrong to criticize these basic ideas, as well as vain and foolish. The struggle to achieve them is part of human society.

Nor have I engaged in detailed criticism of Communist theory, although such criticism is needed and useful. I have concentrated on a description of contemporary Communism, touching upon theory only where necessary.

It is impossible to express all my observations and experiences in a work as brief as this one. I have stated only the most essential of them, using generalizations where they were unavoidable.

This account may appear strange to those who live in the non-Communist world; it would not seem unusual to those who live in the Communist one: I claim no exclusive credit or distinction for presenting the picture of that world, nor for the ideas concerning it. They are simply the picture and ideas of the world in which I live. I am a product of that world. I have contributed to it. Now I am one of its critics.

Only on the surface is this inconsistent. I have struggled in the past, and am struggling now, for a better world. That struggle may not produce the desired results. Nevertheless, the logic of my action is contained in the length and continuity of that struggle.

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Origins

1.

The roots of modern Communism reach back very far, although they were dormant before the development of modern industry in western Europe. Communism's basic ideas are the Primacy of Matter and the Reality of Change, ideas borrowed from thinkers of the period just before the inception of Communism. As Communism endures and gains strength, these basic ideas play a less and less important role. This is understandable: once in power, Communism tends to remodel the rest of the world according to its own ideas and tends less and less to change itself.

Dialectics and materialism—the changing of the world independently of human will—formed the basis of the old, classical, Marxist Communism. These basic ideas were not originated by Communist theorists, such as Marx or Engels. They borrowed them and wove them into a whole, thus forming, unintentionally, the basis for a new conception of the world.

The idea of the Primacy of Matter was borrowed from the French materialists of the eighteenth century. Earlier thinkers, including Democritus in ancient Greece, had expressed it in a different way. The idea of the reality of change, caused by the struggle of opposites, called Dialectics, was taken over from

Hegel; the same idea had been expressed in a different way by Heraclitus in ancient Greece.

Without going into the details of the differences between Marxist ideas and preceding similar theories, it is necessary to point out that Hegel, in presenting the idea of the Reality of Change, retained the concept of an unchanging supreme law, or the Idea of the Absolute. As he expressed it, in the last analysis there are unchangeable laws which, independently of human will, govern nature, society, and human beings.

Although stressing the idea of the Reality of Change, Marx, and especially Engels, stated that the laws of the objective or material world were unchangeable and independent of human beings. Marx was certain that he would discover the basic laws governing life and society, just as Darwin had discovered the laws governing living creatures. At any rate, Marx did clarify some social laws, particularly the way in which these laws operated in the period of early industrial capitalism.

This fact alone, even if accepted as accurate, cannot in itself justify the contention of modern Communists that Marx discovered all the laws of society. Still less can it justify their attempt to model society after those ideas in the same way that livestock is bred on the basis of the discoveries of Lamarck and Darwin. Human society cannot be compared to species of animals or to inanimate objects; it is composed of individuals and groups which are continuously and consciously active in it, growing and changing.

In the pretensions of contemporary Communism of being, if not the unique and absolute, but in any case the highest science, based on dialectical materialism, are hidden the seeds of its despotism. The origin of these pretensions can be found in the ideas of Marx, though Marx himself did not anticipate them.

Of course, contemporary Communism does not deny the existence of an objective or unchanging body of laws. However, when in power, it acts in an entirely different manner toward

human society and the individual, and uses methods to establish its power different from those its theories would suggest.

Beginning with the premise that they alone know the laws which govern society, Communists arrive at the oversimplified and unscientific conclusion that this alleged knowledge gives them the power and the exclusive right to change society and to control its activities. This is the major error of their system.

Hegel claimed that the absolute monarchy in Prussia was the incarnation of his idea of the Absolute. The Communists, on the other hand, claim that they represent the incarnation of the objective aspirations of society. Here is more than just one difference between the Communists and Hegel; there is also a difference between the Communists and absolute monarchy. The monarchy did not think quite as highly of itself as the Communists do of themselves, nor was it as absolute as they are.

2.

Hegel himself was probably troubled by the possible conclusions to be drawn from his own discoveries. For instance, if everything was constantly being transformed, what would happen to his own ideas and to the society which he wanted to preserve? As a professor by royal appointment he could not have dared, in any case, to make public recommendations for the improvement of society on the basis of his philosophy.

This was not the case with Marx. As a young man he took an active part in the 1848 revolution. He went to extremes in drawing conclusions from Hegel's ideas. Was not the bloody class struggle raging all over Europe straining toward something new and higher? It appeared not only that Hegel was right—that is, Hegel as interpreted by Marx—but also that philosophical systems no longer had meaning and justification, since science was discovering objective laws so rapidly, including those applicable to society.

In science, Comte's positivism had already triumphed as a method of inquiry; the English school of political economy (Smith, Ricardo, and others) was at its height; epochal laws were being discovered from day to day in the natural sciences; modern industry was carving out its path on the basis of scientific technology; and the wounds of young capitalism revealed themselves in the suffering and the beginning struggle of the proletariat. Apparently this was the onset of the domination of science, even over society, and the elimination of the capitalistic concept of ownership as the final obstacle to human happiness and freedom.

The time was ripe for one great conclusion. Marx had both the daring and the depth to express it, but there were no social forces available on which he could rely.

Marx was a scientist and an ideologist. As a scientist, he made important discoveries, particularly in sociology. As an ideologist, he furnished the ideological basis for the greatest and most important political movements of modern history, which took place first in Europe and are now taking place in Asia.

But, just because he was a scientist, economist, and sociologist, Marx never thought of constructing an all-inclusive philosophical or ideological system. He once said: "One thing is certain; I am not a Marxist." His great scientific talent gave him the greatest advantage over all his socialist predecessors, such as Owen and Fourier. The fact that he did not insist on ideological all-inclusiveness or his own philosophical system gave him an even greater advantage over his disciples. Most of the latter were ideologists and only to a very limited degree—as the examples of Plekhanov, Labriola, Lenin, Kautsky, and Stalin will show—scientists. Their main desire was to construct a system out of Marx's ideas; this was especially true of those who knew little philosophy and had even less talent for it. As the time passed, Marx's successors revealed a tendency to present his teachings as a finite and all-inclusive concept of the world, and to regard themselves as responsible for the continuation

of all of Marx's work, which they considered as being virtually complete. Science gradually yielded to propaganda, and as a result, propaganda tended more and more to represent itself as science.

Being a product of his time, Marx denied the need for any kind of philosophy. His closest friend, Engels, declared that philosophy had died with the development of science. Marx's thesis was not at all original. The so-called scientific philosophy, especially after Comte's positivism and Feuerbach's materialism, had become the general fashion.

It is easy to understand why Marx denied both the need for and the possibility of establishing any kind of philosophy. It is harder to understand why his successors tried to arrange his ideas into an all-inclusive system, into a new, exclusive philosophy. Even though they denied the need for any kind of philosophy, in practice they created a dogma of their own which they considered to be the "most scientific" or the "only scientific" system. In a period of general scientific enthusiasm and of great changes brought about in everyday life and industry by science, they could not help but be materialists and to consider themselves the "only" representatives of the "only" scientific view and method, particularly since they represented a social stratum which was in conflict with all the accepted ideas of the time.

Marx's ideas were influenced by the scientific atmosphere of his time, by his own leanings toward science, and by his revolutionary aspiration to give to the working-class movement a more or less scientific basis. His disciples were influenced by a different environment and by different motives when they converted his views into dogma.

If the political needs of the working-class movement in Europe had not demanded a new ideology complete in itself, the philosophy that calls itself Marxist, the dialectical materialism, would have been forgotten—dismissed as something not particularly profound or even original, though Marx's eco-

conomic and social studies are of the highest scientific and literary rank.

The strength of Marxist philosophy did not lie in its scientific elements, but in its connection with a mass movement, and most of all in its emphasis on the objective of changing society. It stated again and again that the existing world would change simply because it had to change, that it bore the seeds of its own opposition and destruction; that the working class wanted this change and would be able to effect it. Inevitably, the influence of this philosophy increased and created in the European working-class movement the illusion that it was omnipotent, at least as a method. In countries where similar conditions did not exist, such as Great Britain and the United States, the influence and importance of this philosophy was insignificant, despite the strength of the working class and the working-class movement.

As a science, Marxist philosophy was not important, since it was based mainly on Hegelian and materialistic ideas. As the ideology of the new, oppressed classes and especially of political movements, it marked an epoch, first in Europe, and later in Russia and Asia, providing the basis for a new political movement and a new social system.

3.

Marx thought that the replacement of capitalist society would be brought about by a revolutionary struggle between its two basic classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The clash seemed all the more likely to him because in the capitalistic system of that time both poverty and wealth kept increasing unchecked, on the opposite poles of a society that was shaken by periodic economic crises.

In the last analysis, Marxist teaching was the product of the

industrial revolution or of the struggle of the industrial proletariat for a better life. It was no accident that the frightful poverty and brutalization of the masses which accompanied industrial change had a powerful influence on Marx. His most important work, *Das Kapital*, contains a number of important and stirring pages on this topic. The recurring crises, which were characteristic of the capitalism of the nineteenth century, together with the poverty and the rapid increase of the population, logically led Marx to the belief that revolution was the only solution. Marx did not consider revolution to be inevitable in all countries, particularly not in those where democratic institutions were already a tradition of social life. He cited as examples of such countries, in one of his talks, the Netherlands, Great Britain and the United States. However, one can conclude from his ideas, taken as a whole, that the inevitability of revolution was one of his basic beliefs. He believed in revolution and preached it; he was a revolutionary.

Marx's revolutionary ideas, which were conditional and not universally applicable, were changed by Lenin into absolute and universal principles. In *The Infantile Disorder of "Left-Wing" Communism*, perhaps his most dogmatic work, Lenin developed these principles still more, differing with Marx's position that revolution was avoidable in certain countries. He said that Great Britain could no longer be regarded as a country in which revolution was avoidable, because during the First World War she had become a militaristic power, and therefore the British working class had no other choice but revolution. Lenin erred, not only in his failure to understand that "British militarism" was only a temporary, wartime phase of development, but because he failed to foresee the further development of democracy and economic progress in Great Britain or other Western countries. He also did not understand the nature of the English trade-union movement. He placed too much emphasis on his own, or Marxian, deterministic, scientific ideas and paid too little attention to the objective social role and

potentialities of the working class in more highly developed countries. Although he disclaimed it, he did in fact proclaim his theories and the Russian revolutionary experience to be universally applicable.

According to Marx's hypothesis and his conclusions on the subject, the revolution would occur first of all in the highly developed capitalist countries. Marx believed that the results of the revolution—that is, the new socialist society—would lead to a new and higher level of freedom than that prevalent in the existing society, in so-called liberal capitalism. This is understandable. In the very act of rejecting various types of capitalism, Marx was at the same time a product of his epoch, the liberal capitalist epoch.

In developing the Marxist stand that capitalism must be replaced not only by a higher economic and social form—that is, socialism—but by a higher form of human freedom, the Social Democrats justifiably considered themselves to be Marx's successors. They had no less right to this claim than the Communists, who cited Marx as the source of their idea that the replacement of capitalism can take place only by revolutionary means. However, both groups of Marx's followers—the Social Democrats and the Communists—were only partly right in citing him as the basis for their ideas. In citing Marx's ideas they were defending their own practices, which had originated in a different, and already changed society. And, although both cited and depended on Marxist ideas, the Social Democratic and Communist movements developed in different directions.

In countries where political and economic progress was difficult, and where the working class played a weak role in society, the need arose slowly to make a system and a dogma out of Marxist teaching. Moreover, in countries where economic forces and social relations were not yet ripe for industrial change, as in Russia and later in China, the adoption and dogmatization of the revolutionary aspects of Marxist teachings was more rapid and complete. There was emphasis on *revolution* by the work-