

V. I. LENIN

**MATERIALISM AND
EMPIRIO-CRITICISM**

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TEN QUESTIONS TO A LECTURER¹

1. Does the lecturer acknowledge that the philosophy of Marxism is *dialectical materialism*?

If he does not, why has he never analysed Engels' countless statements on this subject?

If he does, why do the Machists call their "revision" of dialectical materialism "the philosophy of Marxism"?

2. Does the lecturer acknowledge Engels' fundamental division of philosophical systems into *idealism* and *materialism*, Engels regarding those intermediate between these two, wavering between them, as the *line* of Hume in modern philosophy, calling this line "agnosticism" and declaring Kantianism to be a variety of agnosticism?

3. Does the lecturer acknowledge that recognition of the external world and its reflection in the human mind form the basis of the theory of knowledge of dialectical materialism?

4. Does the lecturer acknowledge as correct Engels' argument concerning the conversion of "things-in-themselves" into "things-for-us"?

5. Does the lecturer acknowledge as correct Engels' assertion that the "real unity of the world consists in its materiality"? (*Anti-Dühring*, 2nd ed., 1886, p. 28, section 1, part IV on world schematism.)²

6. Does the lecturer acknowledge as correct Engels' assertion that "matter without motion is as inconceivable as motion without matter"? (*Anti-Dübring*, 1886, 2nd ed., p. 45, in part 6 on natural philosophy, cosmogony, physics and chemistry.)³

7. Does the lecturer acknowledge that the ideas of causality, necessity, law, etc., are a reflection in the human mind of laws of nature, of the real world? Or was Engels wrong in saying so? (*Anti-Dübring*, S. 20-21, in part III on apriorism, and S. 103-04, in part XI on freedom and necessity.)⁴

8. Does the lecturer know that Mach expressed his agreement with the head of the immanentist school, Schuppe, and even dedicated his last and chief philosophical work to him? How does the lecturer explain this adherence of Mach to the obviously idealist philosophy of Schuppe, a defender of *clericalism* and in general a downright reactionary in philosophy?

9. Why did the lecturer keep silent about "adventure" with his comrade of yesterday (according to the *Studies*⁵), the Menshevik Yushkevich, who has today declared Bogdanov⁶ (following in the wake of Rakhmetov⁷) an *idealist*? Is the lecturer aware that Petzoldt in his latest book has classed a number of Mach's disciples *among the idealists*?

10. Does the lecturer confirm the fact that Machism has nothing in common with Bolshevism? And that Lenin has repeatedly protested against Machism?⁸ And that the Mensheviks Yushkevich and Valentinov⁹ are "pure" empirio-criticists?

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MATERIALISM AND EMPIRIO-CRITICISM

Critical Comments on a Reactionary
Philosophy¹⁰

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

A number of writers, would-be Marxists, have this year undertaken a veritable campaign against the philosophy of Marxism. In the course of less than half a year four books devoted mainly and almost exclusively to attacks on dialectical materialism have made their appearance. These include first and foremost *Studies in* [? — it would have been more proper to say “against”]⁴¹ *the Philosophy of Marxism* (St. Petersburg, 1908), a symposium by Bazarov, Bogdanov, Lunacharsky, Berman, Helfond, Yushkevich and Suvorov; Yushkevich’s *Materialism and Critical Realism*; Berman’s *Dialectics in the Light of the Modern Theory of Knowledge* and Valentinov’s *The Philosophical Constructions of Marxism*.

All these people could not have been ignorant of the fact that Marx and Engels scores of times termed their philosophical views dialectical materialism. Yet all these people, who, despite the sharp divergence of their political views, are united in their hostility towards dialectical materialism, at the same time claim to be Marxists in philosophy! Engels’ dialectics is “mysticism,” says Berman. Engels’ views have become “antiquated,” remarks Bazarov casually, as though

it were a self-evident fact. Materialism thus appears to be refuted by our bold warriors, who proudly allude to the "modern theory of knowledge," "recent philosophy" (or "recent positivism"), the "philosophy of modern natural science," or even the "philosophy of natural science of the twentieth century." Supported by all these supposedly recent doctrines, our destroyers of dialectical materialism proceed fearlessly to downright fideism*¹² (in the case of Lunacharsky it is most evident, but by no means in his case alone!¹³). Yet when it comes to an explicit definition of their attitude towards Marx and Engels, all their courage and all their respect for their own convictions at once disappear. In deed — a complete renunciation of dialectical materialism, *i. e.*, of Marxism; in word — endless subterfuges, attempts to evade the essence of the question, to cover their retreat, to put some materialist or other in place of materialism in general, and a determined refusal to make a direct analysis of the innumerable materialist declarations of Marx and Engels. This is truly "mutiny on one's knees," as it was justly characterised by one Marxist. This is typical philosophical revisionism, for it was only the revisionists who gained a sad notoriety for themselves by their departure from the fundamental views of Marxism and by their fear, or inability, to "settle accounts" openly, explicitly, resolutely and clearly with the views they had abandoned. When orthodox Marxists had occasion to pronounce against some antiquated views of Marx (for instance, Mehring when he opposed certain historical propositions), it was always done with such precision

* *Fideism* is a doctrine which substitutes faith for knowledge, or which generally attaches significance to faith.

and thoroughness that no one has ever found anything ambiguous in such literary utterances.

For the rest, there is in the *Studies "in" the Philosophy of Marxism* one phrase which resembles the truth. This is Lunacharsky's phrase: "Perhaps we [*i.e.*, all the collaborators of the *Studies* evidently] have gone astray, but we are seeking" (p. 161). That the first half of this phrase contains an absolute and the second a relative truth, I shall endeavour to demonstrate circumstantially in the present book. At the moment I would only remark that if our philosophers had spoken not in the name of Marxism but in the name of a few "seeking" Marxists, they would have shown more respect for themselves and for Marxism.

As for myself, I too am a "seeker" in philosophy. Namely, the task I have set myself in these comments is to find out what was the stumbling block to these people who under the guise of Marxism are offering something incredibly muddled, confused and reactionary.

The Author

September 1908

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

With the exception of a few corrections in the text, the present edition does not differ from the previous one. I hope that, irrespective of the dispute with the Russian "Machians," it will prove useful as an aid to an acquaintance with the philosophy of Marxism, dialectical materialism, as well as with the philosophical conclusions from the recent discoveries in natural science. As for A.A. Bogdanov's latest works, which I have had no opportunity to examine, the appended article by Comrade V.I. Nevsky gives the necessary information.¹⁴ Comrade V.I. Nevsky, not only in his work as a propagandist in general, but also as an active worker in the Party school in particular, has had ample opportunity to convince himself that under the guise of "proletarian culture" A.A. Bogdanov is imparting bourgeois and reactionary views.

N. Lenin

September 2, 1920

IN LIEU OF INTRODUCTION

**HOW CERTAIN "MARXISTS" IN 1908 AND CERTAIN
IDEALISTS IN 1710 REFUTED MATERIALISM**

Anyone in the least acquainted with philosophical literature must know that scarcely a single contemporary professor of philosophy (or of theology) can be found who is not directly or indirectly engaged in refuting materialism. They have declared materialism refuted a thousand times, yet are continuing to refute it for the thousand and first time. All our revisionists are engaged in refuting materialism, pretending, however, that actually they are only refuting the materialist Plekhanov, and not the materialist Engels, nor the materialist Feuerbach, nor the materialist views of J. Dietzgen — and, moreover, that they are refuting materialism from the standpoint of "recent" and "modern" positivism, natural science, and so forth. Without citing quotations, which anyone desiring to do so could cull by the hundred from the books above mentioned, I shall refer to those arguments by which materialism is being combated by Bazarov, Bogdanov, Yushkevich,

Valentinov, Chernov* and other Machians. I shall use this latter term throughout as a synonym for “empirio-criticist” because it is shorter and simpler and has already acquired rights of citizenship in Russian literature. That Ernst Mach is the most popular representative of empirio-criticism today is universally acknowledged in philosophical literature,** while Bogdanov’s and Yushkevich’s departures from “pure” Machism are of absolutely secondary importance, as will be shown later.

The materialists, we are told, recognise something unthinkable and unknowable — “things-in-themselves” — matter “outside of experience” and outside of our knowledge. They lapse into genuine mysticism by admitting the existence of something beyond, something transcending the bounds of “experience” and knowledge. When they say that matter, by acting upon our sense-organs, produces sensations, the materialists take as their basis the “unknown,” nothingness; for do they not themselves declare our sensations to be the only source of knowledge? The materialists lapse into “Kantianism” (Plekhanov, by recognising the existence of “things-in-themselves,” *i.e.*, things outside of our consciousness); they “double” the world and preach “dualism,” for the materialists hold that beyond the appearance there is the thing-in-itself; beyond the immediate sense data there is something else, some fetish, an “idol,” an absolute, a source

* V. Chernov, *Philosophical and Sociological Studies*, Moscow, 1907. The author is as ardent an adherent of Avenarius and an enemy of dialectical materialism as Bazarov and Co.

** See, for instance, Dr. Richard Höningwald, *Ueber die Lehre Humes von der Realität der Aussendinge* [*Hume's Doctrine of the Reality of the External World*], Berlin, 1904, S. 26.