

## Chapter II

### THE MARXIAN CONCEPTION OF THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

The Marxian theory of social growth and change is essentially economic and evolutionary. It is based on the following main postulates:

1. In every historical period the prevailing method of wealth production and exchange constitutes the basis of society and determines its political forms and intellectual conceptions.<sup>1</sup>\*

2. Every social order is in a perpetual state of flux and change and eventually reaches a point in its development at which its political and social forms of organization become an obstacle to further growth. At that point a break occurs. The impeding political and social institutions are overthrown, and are replaced by new institutions adapted to the new needs. A social revolution is accomplished.

3. Conversely, so long as an economic system re-

\* 1 "In every historical epoch the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily flowing from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch." Frederick Engels in Preface to "Communist Manifesto."

tains vitality it cannot be forcibly abolished. No social order can give birth to a new society before it is fully matured and has exhausted all its possibilities of growth and expansion. No phase of social development can be skipped over.<sup>2</sup>

4. All societies of advanced systems of wealth production invariably create antagonistic social classes, property owners and propertyless workers, the privileged and the subjugated. It is always the aim of the former to maintain the old order, as it is always in the interests of the latter to overthrow it. The clash of interests assumes the character of struggle between these classes, and the political victory of the subjugated class over the ruling class constitutes the outward form of the social revolution.

This universal and unalterable law of economic determinism is the key to the true understanding of the modern capitalist state and the guiding post to the coming Socialist society.

The capitalist régime has gradually evolved from the feudal state as the economic order rooted in agriculture gave way to the growing predominance of modern industries. It was marked by the political victory of the bourgeoisie over the class of the land-

<sup>2</sup> "No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society." Karl Marx, in the Preface to his "Critique of Political Economy."

owing nobility, and was ushered in by the industrial revolution of England, and the great political revolution of France.

But in the rapid progress of its growth capitalist society, like all preceding social orders, creates the germs of its own destruction. The individualistic system of capitalism begets, develops and organizes social forces of production. As the initial phases of capitalist economy based on individual handicraft gradually grow into the modern system of large-scale production, as the hand-tool of the old-time mechanic develops into the powerful steam or electrically-propelled machine; as the small workshop gives way to the gigantic factory; the stage coach to the railroad, the sailing vessel to the steamboat, the personal messenger to the post, telegraph, telephone and cable, all economic and political relations of the classes are radically revolutionized, and the foundation is laid for a new and higher social order.

Capitalism welds together the small and scattered productive units of a country into powerful consolidated concerns, and organizes industries on a large scale and planful basis. It thus makes it physically possible for the organized community to take over the operation of the industries as a social function.

The modern factory assembles large masses of workers under one roof and organizes their work on the principle of division of labor. It thus transforms the production of commodities from an individual

into a collective process and schools the workers in the art and habit of co-operation.

As the capitalist mode of production is unfolded and perfected, industrial units become ever more consolidated and concentrated. Independent capitalist enterprises steadily diminish in numbers, and with them diminish the independent capitalists.

On the other hand, the number of the wage earners increases with the growth of industry. Their ranks are reinforced not only by the influx from the village to the city, from the field to the factory, but also by the progressive displacement of small independent producers and traders, who are compelled to seek employment in the service of large capitalist concerns.

But what the capitalist class loses in numbers through the process of industrial concentration it gains in wealth and power through the same process. The more advanced a country is industrially, the more absolute, as a rule, is the economic domination of the capitalists, their influence over the government and press and other organs of political control. At the same time the material conditions of the workers grow more uncertain and precarious as their labor contract passes from the hands of many competing employers into those of one trustified or monopolistic corporate boss. Class antagonisms thus become more acute, and class struggles more embittered.

In this irrepressible and intensified class struggle

the strength of the workers is bound to grow at the expense of the privileged classes, not only because their steadily increasing numerical preponderance gives them an inherent physical and political advantage, but also because the process of capitalist development, by massing them together in industrial centers and around industrial establishments and forcing them into collective struggle against common oppression, almost mechanically unites and organizes their forces, develops in them the feeling of class consciousness and class solidarity, educates them to the ideal of working class control and trains them in industrial and political methods of struggle for the attainment of that ideal.

It is upon this growing physical, moral and intellectual strength of the workers in their struggle against the increasing oppression of the capitalist economic order that the ultimate triumph of Socialism is predicated.

Capitalist society is accomplishing its work in history and losing justification for further existence. It has borne and nurtured within its womb the infant of Socialism, who clamors to enter upon his inheritance. Socialism is the child of capitalism. Without capitalism there can be no Socialism.

This conception runs like a red thread through the works of Marx and Engels. It was at the bottom of all Socialist politics and tactics before the war.

Already in the Communist Manifesto the salient points of the doctrine are definitely outlined. After sketching the universal economic and political rise of the capitalist class upon the ruins of the feudal order, the authors of the classic document proceed to these conclusions: "A similar movement is going on before our own eyes. Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange, and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.

\* \* \* "The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself.

But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class—the proletarians.

With the development of industry the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows and it feels the strength more."

\* \* \* "The growing competition among the bourgeois, and the resulting commercial crises, make the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating. The unceasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, make their livelihood more and more pre-

carious; the collisions between individual worker and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes. Thereupon the workers begin to form combinations (Trades' Unions) against the bourgeois, they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts."

\* \* \* "This organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises again; stronger, firmer, mightier."

Twenty years later Karl Marx formulated this conception even more clearly and succinctly in the following famous passage from his *Capital*:

\* \* \* "As soon as this process of transformation has sufficiently decomposed the old society from top to bottom, as soon as the laborers are turned into proletarians, their means of labor into capital, as soon as the capitalist mode of production stands on its own feet, then the further socialization of labor and further transformation of the land and other means of production into socially exploited and, therefore, common means of production, as well as the further expropriation of private proprietors, takes a new form. That which is now to be expropriated is no longer the laborer working for himself, but the capitalist exploiting many laborers.

“This expropriation is accomplished by the immanent laws of capitalistic production itself, by the centralization of capital. One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralization, or this expropriation of many capitalists by the few, develop, on an ever extending scale, the co-operative forms of the labor-process, the conscious application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, and transformation of the instruments of labor into instruments usable only in common, the economizing of all means of production by their use as the means of production of combined, socialized labor, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market, and with this, the international character of the capitalistic régime. Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolize all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation, but with it, too, grows the revolt of the working class, always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourishes along with and under it. Centralization of the means of production and the socialization of labor at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst



asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.”<sup>3</sup>

The indispensable conditions of a socialist revolution as understood by the Marxian school of Socialism may thus be summarized as follows:

1. A capitalist system of wealth production in a high state of development and concentration.

2. As a sequel, the prevalence of collective or “socialized” work in such industries.

3. A powerful class of capitalist magnates.

4. A large industrial working class constituting the majority of the population and suitably “disciplined, united and organized.”

5. An acute, active and conscious class struggle between the capitalists and the workers.

None of these conditions was present in Russia in 1917.

The country was overwhelmingly agricultural with rare and isolated spots of industrial capitalism.

The bourgeoisie was neither large nor powerful, and was not in control of the government.

The industrial workers constituted less than one-tenth of the population; their class discipline was lax,

<sup>3</sup> “English Translation”—American edition, Chicago, 1908, page 836.

and their class organization, political and economic, quite undeveloped.

The struggle between the Russian bourgeoisie and workers was in the incipient stage, sporadic and relatively insignificant.

According to all accepted Marxian tests, Russia was entirely unprepared for a Socialist revolution.