

CHAPTER VI

THEORY OF EQUILIBRIUM

WE HAVE EXPONDED the basic moments of the law of the unity of opposites—the essence of dialectic.

Bukharin does not understand this law. In his book *The Theory of Historic Materialism* he set himself the task of, as it were, transposing Hegel's idealistic mystical teaching on contradiction into a materialistic key. From Bukharin's view-point this must signify the translation of Hegelian dialectic into the language of modern mechanism. True to his position he holds that Hegel and Marx in speaking of movement by means of contradictions, implied in fact a collision of two oppositely directed forces. External forces collide and form a temporary, mobile equilibrium, which is then broken and is again set up on a new basis. Following Hegel, he called the primitive state of equilibrium "thesis," its destruction "antithesis," and the setting up of equilibrium on a new basis ("in which opposites are reconciled") "synthesis." Bukharin expounds his theory thus: Everything consists of a number of elements connected with each other, which form a certain system. Every such "system" is connected with such other systems as compose its environment. Environment and system act mutually. This contradiction of system and environment lies, according to Bukharin, at the basis of all development.

Bukharin does not deny internal contradictions. He admits that in society, for instance, there exists a number of internal contradictions: contradictions between productive forces and the relations of production, contradictions

of class, etc. But these internal contradictions, according to Bukharin, are the resultant of the external contradictions of the environment and the system. Thus class struggle within society is determined, according to Bukharin, by the contradiction of society and nature. Bukharin writes:

“Internal (structural) equilibrium is a magnitude dependent on external equilibrium, is a ‘function’ of this external equilibrium.”

Such is Bukharin’s theory of equilibrium which he advances as the only correct, “theoretically systematic exposition and basis” of the Marxian dialectic. All that has been expounded in the foregoing pages makes clear that this theory leaves out of account the determining rôle of internal contradictions, the indissoluble connection of opposing aspects, their transitions into each other, their identity, and replaces the conflict of opposites by their reconciliation, i.e. it distorts the law of the division of unity and has nothing in common with Marx-Leninism. Bukharin’s theory of equilibrium is not new. It enjoys great popularity in bourgeois sociology and economics. The bourgeois philosopher and sociologist, Herbert Spencer, built upon just such a theory a mechanistic theory of evolution. In his opinion, there exist in nature forces directed against each other, between which an equilibrium is eventually established. The direction of movement in a phenomenon is determined by the quantitative predominance of this or that opposing aspect. Thus, for example, tyranny and freedom are, in his opinion, two independent forces, which all the time seek to balance each other, from which it follows that from the quantitative predominance of freedom or tyranny depends the movement of both these antagonists. But Herbert Spencer, in contrast to Bukharin, never called his theory dialectic. Prior to Spencer, Dühring, who directly attacked the dialectic of Marx and Engels, wrote: “Antagonism of forces that oppose each other in an opposite direction is also the basic form of all the actions

and manifestations of nature.” Engels, in *Anti-Dühring*, strongly criticized this view. The theory of equilibrium was most clearly formulated by Bogdanov, who sought to reconcile idealism and materialism. Long before Bukharin he set himself the task of transferring on to the soil of materialism not only the dialectic of Hegel, but also the dialectic of Marx and Engels which, in his opinion, was not completely emancipated from the idealism from which it originally sprang. The Marxian conception of dialectic, that is to say, of development, suffers, says Bogdanov, in common with the purely Hegelian conception, from lack of clarity and completeness, and for this reason the application of the dialectical method is inaccurate and diffuse. Bogdanov, long before Bukharin, translates dialectic into the “language of mechanics.” Just like Spencer and Dühring he holds that movement through contradictions is a conflict between “two oppositely directed activities.” But he admits at once that such a conception of the law of contradictory development parts company with the basic propositions of Marxism, and goes on to assert that Marxism by its failure to realize this truth is unable to explain the transition of quantity into quality. Bogdanov defines dialectic as “an organized process that proceeds by way of the conflict of opposing forces.” Movement, in his opinion, begins first as an equilibrium which contains no contradictions; then that equilibrium is destroyed by the conflict of two opposing forces and set up anew on a fresh basis. The basic, determining contradiction, he holds to be the external, which is conditioned by the conflict of internal forces and by the preponderance of one of them at a determined stage. In his opinion the basic contradiction is between the environment and the system.

This theory of equilibrium enjoyed great popularity among various groups whose social and economic policies were in opposition to the Bolshevik line.

Bukharin was also led to argue that class contradictions are only the results of the contradiction between society and the natural environment, so that if the equilibrium

of society and nature is upset then the conflict of classes is intensified; if society and nature are in stable equilibrium then the class struggle ceases.

Although Bukharin tries to combine this theory with the Marx-Leninist theory of the inevitability of the proletarian revolution in view of the internal contradictions of capitalism, yet it is perfectly clear that Bukharin, by belittling the internal contradictions and not admitting their determined rôle, cannot prove the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism.

Following Bogdanov he holds that society (including a Soviet economic order) develops when in return for its expended working energy it receives from nature as much or more energy. When this is the case we get equilibrium between society and nature.

The whole economic policy of Soviet society must proceed from the necessity of establishing such an equilibrium and must not allow any chance infringement of it.

Bukharin proceeds to argue that the class struggle and similar contradictions can and should be removed with all speed by establishing an equilibrium between society and nature. This can be done by balancing the different factors in the natural economy.

From this it follows that the point of crucial importance is that part of the economic plan where production has fallen behind. It may be iron, in which case engineering production generally will be held up. It may be bricks, in which case the building plan will be delayed. But these "equilibrium sociologists" deduced from their theory that the way to restore equilibrium was to cut down production and building to the level of the diminished supplies of iron and bricks. In other words we are to avoid the contradiction of the class struggle by slowing down capital construction.

They also hold that we should overcome the contradiction between decaying small-scale individualist agricultural economy and large-scale socialist industry not by bringing the development of agriculture up to the level of industry

(which is possible only by its transition to socialist forms of farming), but on the contrary, by lowering the tempo of the development of industry and thus establishing an equilibrium between them. Stalin himself dealt with this theory in his speech to the Agrarian Conference.

"It is supposed," said Stalin, "that we have a socialist and a capitalist sector, side by side. These two compartments are completely isolated from one another. Each can pursue its own course without affecting the other. It is a geometrical fact that parallel lines do not meet, but the authors of this remarkable theory think that at some time or other these parallels will meet, and when they do, we shall have socialism."

Whence also arose the struggle against the Bolshevik tempo of industrial development, against rapid industrialization, and the struggle of some years ago to speed up light industry (at the cost of slowing down our plan for rapid capital development), in order to provide the individual peasants immediately with generous supplies of consumption goods, this same struggle aiming at perpetuating the small peasant economy for many years to come. This, in their opinion, would be the guarantee of a swiftly obtained equilibrium between agricultural economy and industry and of a harmonious development towards socialism without any intensification of class conflict.

Marx-Leninist dialectic does not deny external contradictions—the action of one process on another. On the contrary it proceeds from the idea of an indissoluble connection of all processes of actuality and demands a knowledge of the mutual action of processes, their influence on each other, and their mutual penetration.

But whereas mechanism and its theory of equilibrium regard any phenomenon as the result of the external action of processes on each other, and opposes one to the other as external and independent aspects of one and the same process, dialectic sees in the external only a particular form

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in which the internal manifests itself. Therefore, when we speak of the mutual action of the aspect of one process the dialectician will not be deceived by the moment of independence, of "externality," of these aspects but will seek to disclose in them, as the basis of their mutual action, as the actual "source of self-movement" of the process, their unifying internal contradiction. And so the dialectician will not classify the qualitatively different and mutually interacting processes as wholly independent and mutually external "systems" and "environments." Moreover, since dialectic proceeds from the idea of an internal "unity of the world, which is contained in the fact of its being material," dialectic will see in the mutual action of external processes the mutual action of the diverse forms and degrees of matter alone, which matter is developed in these forms and through their mutual action. Therefore, dialectic will regard the external mutual action of processes as a moment of world development and will never forget that the *basic* law underlying all moments is that of the unity and conflict of opposites.

There is of course no development of a process apart from its mutual action with other processes. It is a complete distortion of Leninism to represent the doctrine of self-movement, of spontaneous development, as though certain internal principles, locked up as it were and isolated from relations with the environment, were the determining factors in self-movement and provided all the conditions of development. But the external always plays its separate part not as the basis of development, but as one of its necessary conditions, and therefore its influence on a process may be understood only on the basis of a knowledge of those internal contradictions which fundamentally determine the course of development.

Marx-Leninist dialectic does not deny the contradiction of society and nature, but regards it as not the main, not the determining contradiction of social development. When we study history we see in a number of countries that whereas the geographic, climatic conditions, the vegetable

and animal world, the natural riches, remained relatively unchanged, yet the social relations were changed, e.g. feudalism was replaced by capitalism.

In the development of any particular social structure, for instance capitalism, dialectic regards the internal contradiction between capitalist productive forces and the capitalist relations of production as the important and determining factor. The contradiction between society and nature exists of course under capitalism, but the particular form of this contradiction is determined not by the properties of the geographical environment but by the basic laws of the development of capitalism. Society, by virtue of its internal law-governance and its development of productive forces, changes the geographical environment by ways and means specific for each social formation. Especially comprehensive was this changing of geographical environment by social man under capitalism with its machine technique and with its social character of production. There is a shortage of forests—the felling of them and their replanting are regulated. There is not enough coal—they substitute "white coal," i.e. petroleum. There is not enough leather, wool, silk—they make leather, wool and silk artificially. If there is not enough moisture from the atmosphere, they irrigate. The animal and vegetable world is being refashioned, for they are creating new breeds of animals, new types of plants.

If in capitalist society the total amount of change in nature is, in spite of this, extremely limited, then once again this is explained not by the contradiction between society and nature but by capitalist productive relations, which do not permit the fullest possible development of productive forces. Only socialism guarantees such a possibility. The determining rôle of the social system in this matter of nature and society is clearly seen in the U.S.S.R. to-day, where the unified economic plan makes use of all the achievements of science and is changing the face of the whole country.

The contradictions between the capitalist and socialist systems do, of course, influence the development of socialist

relationships in the U.S.S.R. But socialist society is developing on the basis of internal laws, on the basis of internal contradictions, and not on the basis of the external contradictions between the capitalist world and ourselves. The development of the U.S.S.R. is by no means subordinate to the development of capitalist world economy as Trotsky thinks. Economic and financial blockade, the refusal of credits, the blocking of Soviet exports, the different forms of diplomatic pressure, etc.—all are in some degree reflected in the development of socialism in the U.S.S.R., but the character and degree of the reflection are determined by the internal contradictions in our country. The degree in which the development of socialism is checked by international capitalism depends on the degree of development and relative strength of the socialist and capitalist elements within the country. The weaker the former and the stronger the latter, the lower will be the tempo of industrialization and collectivization of the country, the feebler the onslaught on the capitalist elements, and the feebler our defence of the socialist front-line trenches. The stronger the force of kulakism, of N.E.P. in our country, the wider the net of our enemies. The greater the bureaucratism, the stronger the influence of opportunism in our ranks—so much the more vulnerable are we. In fact the *degree* in which our movement can be hampered by international capitalism depends in the last resort upon ourselves, upon the internal conditions of the country, and it would be completely untrue to attribute the rate of transition or the forms of transition to the varying influences of the capitalist world upon the Soviet Union.

A clear proof of this proposition and one which upsets all the assertions of the Trotskyists, is to be found in the fact that the world crisis of capitalism has not fundamentally affected the U.S.S.R. This crisis undoubtedly brought with it a number of complementary difficulties for our task of construction (the worsening conditions of credit, the fall of prices for our export, etc.), but it has had no decisive significance for the construction of socialism.

We are constructing socialism on the basis of the internal force of the country; our development towards socialism and the stages through which we pass are determined by the internal laws of social change. Nay more, the very change in the methods of the attack upon us by imperialism can be understood fundamentally only through a knowledge of our internal development.

Even the issue of the desperate attempts of capitalism to destroy the Soviet Union is determined, in significant and ever greater degree, by the measure of our development and by the strength of the Soviet Union—because international capitalism is riven by internal contradictions, and the growth of socialism in the Soviet Union and the significant development of the forces of world proletarian revolution intensify these contradictions.

The full victory of socialism in our country has a decisive importance also for the final victory of socialism.

And so we see that external contradictions certainly influence the development of a process; that such contradictions, however, are only overcome by the internal self-development of that process itself.

The theory of equilibrium ignores the specific properties, the qualitative peculiarity, of the process and its aspects. It replaces qualitative analysis with a purely mechanistic view and mechanistically derives one phenomenon from another.

The theory of equilibrium, by ignoring the concrete content of a process and the necessity of disclosing its "source of self-movement," by belittling the latter or seeking to find the source of movement outside the given process, leads, on the one hand, to an abstract rationalistic approach to questions altogether too general to be of use, and on the other hand, to an empty schematism or to plain empiricism, which fails to penetrate to the heart of things. This ambiguity is characteristic also of our "Rights." Thus on the one hand they approach the questions of Soviet economy abstractly, they do not analyse the concrete conditions, phases and stages of its development, they

cannot understand how the conditions and possibilities of a new phenomenon are created, they do not notice that a new stage of development sets questions in a new way, resolves its contradictions in a new way. On the other hand, by proceeding from the theory of establishing equilibrium, by levelling down to the weak spots in national economy, they arrive at a narrow practicality, aiming at quickly establishing some sort of balance between socialist industry and peasant production, a balance which they would attain by encouraging kulakism and restoring capitalism.

The theory of equilibrium proceeds from the view-point of the reconciliation of opposites. For the upholders of this theory the state of equilibrium is the phase when opposites are reconciled. The upholders of this theory perpetuate the unity of opposites in their old form. They hold that unity cannot be removed by internal forces, it is to be removed only by external action. For them the Leninist proposition of the absoluteness of the conflict of opposites is a door with seven seals !

The theory of equilibrium, which so greatly exaggerates the relative independence of processes and their aspects, which slurs over the internal contradiction of a process, which preaches the reconciliation of opposites, is the theoretical basis of right-opportunism and of many hostile groups and therefore in its class essence is the theory of the restoration of capitalism.

The Deborin group with their tardy criticism of the theory of equilibrium were quite unable to refute it. Apart from the fact that their criticism was too general and abstract, they did not even criticize the theory of equilibrium for its main defects; firstly for its failure to acknowledge the fact that a process is from beginning to end developed by way of contradictions, and secondly for its reconciliation of opposites. They could not finally refute the theory of equilibrium because their own understanding of the law of unity of opposites is almost identical with that theory. Like the mechanists they hold that contradiction is not part of a process at the moment of its emergence, but only at a

certain stage of its development. Whence follows the conclusion, which they themselves are afraid to draw, that up till this moment a process develops as the result of external forces. Like the supporters of the theory which we have been discussing, they share the reformist view of reconciliation of opposites.