

Excerpts from  
*Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology*  
By Nikolai Bukharin, 1921.

*e. The Use of Contradictions in the Historical Process*

The basis of all things is therefore the law of change, the law of constant motion. Two philosophers particularly (the ancient Heraclitus and the modern Hegel, as we have already seen) formulated this law of change, but they did not stop there. They also set up the question of the manner in which the process operates. The answer they discovered was that changes are produced by constant internal contradictions, internal struggle. Thus, Heraclitus [73] declared: "Conflict is the mother of all happenings," while Hegel said: "Contradiction is the power that moves things."

There is no doubt of the correctness of this law. A moment's thought will convince the reader. For, if there were no conflict, no clash of forces, the world would be in a condition of unchanging, stable equilibrium, i.e., complete and absolute permanence, a state of rest precluding all motion. Such a state of rest would be conceivable only in a system whose component parts and forces would be so related as not to permit of the introduction of any conflicts, as to preclude all mutual interaction, all disturbances. As we already know that all things change, all things are "in flux", it is certain that such an absolute state of rest cannot possibly exist. We must therefore reject a condition in which there is no "contradiction between opposing and colliding forces", no disturbance of equilibrium, but only an absolute immutability. Let us take up this matter somewhat more in detail.

In biology, when we speak of adaptation, we mean that process by which one thing assumes a relation toward another thing that enables the two to exist simultaneously. An animal that is "adapted" to its environment is an animal that has achieved the means of living in that environment. It is

suited to its surroundings, its qualities are such as to enable it to continue to live. The mole is "adapted" to conditions prevailing under the earth's surface; the fish, to conditions in the water; either animal transferred to the other's environment will perish at once.

A similar phenomenon may be observed also in so called "inanimate" nature: the earth does not fall into the sun, but revolves around it "without mishap". The relation between the solar system and the universe which surrounds it, enabling both to exist side by side, is a similar relation. In the latter case we commonly speak, not of the adaptation, but of the equilibrium between bodies, or systems of such bodies, etc. We may observe the same state of things in society. Whether we like it or not, society lives within nature: is therefore in one way or another in equilibrium with nature. And the various parts of society, if the latter is capable of surviving, are so adapted to each other as to enable them to exist side by side: capitalism, which included both capitalists and workers, had a very long existence!

In all these examples it is clear that we are dealing with one phenomenon, that of equilibrium. This being the case, where do the contradictions come in? For there is no doubt that conflict [74] is a disturbance of equilibrium. It must be recalled that such equilibrium as we observe in nature and in society is not an absolute, unchanging equilibrium, but an equilibrium in flux, which means that the equilibrium may be established and destroyed, may be reestablished on a new basis, and again disturbed.

The precise conception of equilibrium is about as follows: "We say of a system that it is in a state of equilibrium when the system cannot of itself, i.e., without supplying energy to it from without, emerge

from this state." If—let us say—forces are at work on a body, neutralizing each other, that body is in a state of equilibrium; an increase or decrease in one of these forces will disturb the equilibrium.

If the disturbance of equilibrium is of short duration and the body returns to its former position, the equilibrium is termed stable; if this does not ensue, the equilibrium is unstable. In the natural sciences we have mechanical equilibrium, chemical equilibrium, biological equilibrium. (Cf. H. von Halban: *Chemisches Gleichgewicht*, in *Handwörterbuch der Naturwissenschaften*, vol. ii, Jena, 1912, pp. 470-519, from which we take the above quotation.)

In other words, the world consists of forces, acting in many ways, opposing each other. These forces are balanced for a moment in exceptional cases only. We then have a state of "rest", i.e., their actual "conflict" is concealed. But if we change only one of these forces, immediately the "internal contradictions" will be revealed, equilibrium will be disturbed, and if a new equilibrium is again established, it will be on a new basis, i.e., with a new combination of forces, etc. It follows that the "conflict", the "contradiction", i.e., the antagonism of forces acting in different<sup>1</sup> directions, determines the motion of the system.

On the other hand, we have here also the form of this process: in the first place, the condition of equilibrium; in the second place, a disturbance of this equilibrium; in the third place, the reestablishment of equilibrium on a new basis. And then the story begins all over again: the new equilibrium is the point of departure for a new disturbance, which in turn is followed by another state of equilibrium, etc., ad infinitum. Taken all together, we are dealing with a process of motion based on the development of internal contradictions.

Hegel observed this characteristic of motion and expressed it in the following

manner: he called the original condition of equilibrium the thesis, the disturbance of equilibrium the antithesis, the reestablishment of equilibrium on a new basis the synthesis (the unifying proposition reconciling the contradictions). [75]

The characteristic of motion present in all things, expressing itself in this tripartite formula (or triad) he called dialectic.

The word "dialectics" among the ancient Greeks meant the art of eloquence, of disputation. The course of a discussion is as follows: one man says one thing, another the opposite ("negates" what the first man said); finally, "truth is born from the struggle", and includes a part of the first man's statement and a part of the second man's (synthesis). Similarly, in the process of thought. Since Hegel, being an idealist, regards everything as a self-evolution of the spirit, he of course did not have any disturbances of equilibrium in mind, and the properties of thought as a spiritual and original thing were therefore, in his mind, properties also of being. Marx wrote in this connection: "My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea', he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea'. With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.... With him (Hegel) it (dialectics) is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell" (*Capital*, Chicago, 1915, vol. i, p. 25). For Marx, dialectics means evolution by means of contradictions, particularly, a law of "being", a law of the movement of matter, a law of motion in nature and society. It finds its expression in the process of thought. It is necessary to use the dialectic method, the dialectic mode of thought, because the dialectics of nature may thus be

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<sup>1</sup> Translation corrected.—editor.

grasped.

It is quite possible to transcribe, the "mystical" (as Marx put it) language of the Hegelian dialectics into the language of modern mechanics. Not so long ago, almost all Marxians objected to the mechanical terminology, owing to the persistence of the ancient conception of the atom as a detached isolated particle. But now that we have the Electron Theory, which represents atoms as complete solar systems, we have no reason to shun this mechanical terminology. The most advanced tendencies of scientific thought in all fields accept this point of view. Marx already gives hints of such a formulation (the doctrine of equilibrium between the various branches of production, the theory of labor value based thereon, etc.).

Any object, a stone, a living thing, a human society, etc., may be considered as a whole consisting of parts (elements) related with each other; in other words, this whole may be regarded as a system. And no such system exists in empty space; it is surrounded by other natural objects, which, with reference to it, may be called the environment. For the tree in the forest, the environment means all the other trees, the brook, the earth, the ferns, the grass, the bushes, together with all their properties. Man's environment is society, in the midst of which he lives; the environment of human society is external nature. There is a constant [76] relation between environment and system, and the latter, in turn, acts upon the environment. We must first of all investigate the fundamental question as to the nature of the relations between the environment and the system; how are they to be defined; what are their forms; what is their significance for their system. Three chief types of such relations may be distinguished.

1. *Stable equilibrium*. This is present when the mutual action of the environment and the system results in an unaltered condition, or in a disturbance of the first condition which is again re-established in the original

state. For example, let us consider a certain type of animals living in the steppes. The environment remains unchanged. The quantity of food available for this type of beast neither increases nor decreases; the number of animals preying upon them also remains the same; all the diseases, all the microbes (for all must be included in the "environment"), continue to exist in the original proportions. What will be the result? Viewed as a whole, the number of our animals will remain the same; some of them will die or be destroyed by beasts of prey, others will be born, but the given type and the given conditions of the environment will remain the same as they were before. This means a condition of rest due to an unchanged relation between the system (the given type of animals) and the environment, which is equivalent to stable equilibrium. Stable equilibrium is not always a complete absence of motion; there may be motion, but the resulting disturbance is followed by a reestablishment of equilibrium on the former basis. The contradiction between the environment and the system is constantly being reproduced in the same quantitative relation.

We shall find the case the same in a society of the stagnant type (we shall go into this question more in detail later). If the relation between society and nature remains the same; i.e., if society extracts from nature, by the process of production, precisely as much energy as it consumes, the contradiction between society and nature will again be reproduced in the former shape; the society will mark time, and there results a state of stable equilibrium.

2. *Unstable equilibrium with positive (favorable) indication* (an expanding system). In actual fact, however, stable equilibrium does not exist. It constitutes merely an imaginary, sometimes termed the "ideal", case. As a matter of fact, the relation between environment and the system is never reproduced in precisely [77] the same proportions; the disturbance of equilibrium

never actually leads to its reestablishment on exactly the same basis as before, but a new equilibrium is created on a new basis. For example, in the case of the animals mentioned above, let us assume that the number of beasts of prey opposing them decreases for some reason, while the available food increases. There is no doubt that the number of our animals would then also increase; our "system" will then grow; a new equilibrium is established on a better basis; this means growth. In other words, the contradiction between the environment and the system has become quantitatively different.

If we consider human society, instead of these animals, and assume that the relation between it and nature is altered in such manner that society—by means of production—extracts more energy from nature than is consumed by society (either the soil becomes more fruitful, or new tools are devised, or both), this society will grow and not merely mark time. The new equilibrium will in each case be actually new. The contradiction between society and nature will in each case be reproduced on a new and "higher" basis, a basis on which society will increase and develop. This is a case of unstable equilibrium with positive indication.

3. *Unstable equilibrium with negative indication* (a declining system). Now let us consider the quite different case of a new equilibrium being established on a "lower" basis. Let us suppose, for example, that the quantity of food available to our beasts has decreased, or that the number of beasts of prey has for some reason increased. Our animals will die out. The equilibrium between the system and the environment will in each case be established on the basis of the extinction of a portion of this system. The contradiction will be reestablished on a new basis, with a negative indication. Or, in the case of society, let us assume that the relation between it and nature has been altered in such manner that society is obliged to consume more and more and obtain less and less (the soil is exhausted, technical

methods become poorer, etc.). New equilibrium will here be established in each case on a lowered basis, by reason of the destruction of a portion of society. We are now dealing with a declining society, a disappearing system, in other words, with motion having a negative indication.

Every conceivable case will fall under one of these three heads. At the basis of the motion, as we have seen, there is in fact the contradiction between the environment and the system, which is constantly being reestablished. [78] But the matter has another phase also. Thus far we have spoken only of the contradictions between the environment and the system, i.e., the external contradictions. But there are also internal contradictions, those that are within the system. Each system consists of its component parts (elements), united with each other in one way or another. Human society consists of people; the forests, of trees and bushes; the pile of stones, of the various stones; the herd of animals, of the individual animals, etc. Between them there are a number of contradictions, differences, imperfect adaptations, etc. In other words, here also there is no absolute equilibrium. If there can be, strictly speaking, no absolute equilibrium between the environment and the system, there can also be no such equilibrium between the elements of the system itself.

This may be seen best by the example of the most complicated system, namely, human society. Here we encounter an endless number of contradictions; we find the struggle between classes, which is the sharpest expression of "social contradictions", and we know that "the struggle between classes is the motive force of history". The contradictions between the classes, between groups, between ideals, between the quantity of labor performed by individuals and the quantity of goods distributed to them, the planlessness in production (the capitalist "anarchy" in production), all these constitute an endless chain of contradictions, all of which are within the system

and grow out of its contradictory structure ("structural contradictions"). But these contradictions do not of themselves destroy society. They *may* destroy it (if, for example, both opposing classes in a civil war destroy each other), but it is also possible they may at times not destroy it.

In the latter case, there will be an unstable equilibrium between the various elements of society. We shall later discuss the nature of this equilibrium; for the present we need not go into it. But we must not regard society stupidly, as do so many bourgeois scholars, who overlook its internal contradictions. On the contrary, a scientific consideration of society requires that we consider it from the point of view of the contradictions present within it. Historical "growth" is the development of contradictions.

We must again point out a fact with which we shall have to deal more than once in this book. We have said that these contradictions are of two kinds: between the environment and this system, and between the elements of the system and the system itself. Is [79] there any relation between these two phenomena? A moment's thought will show us that such a relation exists.

It is quite clear that the internal structure of the system (its internal equilibrium) must change together with the relation existing between the system and its environment. The latter relation is the decisive factor; for the entire situation of the system, the fundamental forms of its motion (decline, prosperity, or stagnation) are determined by this relation only.

Let us consider the question in the following form: we have seen above that the character of the equilibrium between society and nature determines the fundamental course of the motion of society. Under these circumstances, could the internal structure continue for long to develop in the opposite direction? Of course not. In the case of a growing society, it would not be possible for the internal structure of society to continue constantly to grow worse. If, in a condition

of growth, the structure of society should become poorer, i.e., its internal disorders grow worse, this would be equivalent to the appearance of a new contradiction: a contradiction between the external and the internal equilibrium, which would require the society, if it is to continue growing, to undertake a reconstruction, i.e., its internal structure must adapt itself to the character of the external equilibrium. Consequently, the internal (structural) equilibrium is a quantity which depends on the external equilibrium (is a "function" of this external equilibrium).

*f. The Theory of Cataclysmic Changes and the Theory of Revolutionary Transformations in the Social Sciences*

We have now to consider the final phase of the dialectic method, namely, the theory of sudden changes. No doubt it is a widespread notion that "nature makes no sudden jumps" (*natura non facit saltus*<sup>2</sup>). This wise saying is often applied in order to demonstrate "irrefutably" the impossibility of revolution, although revolutions have a habit of occurring in spite of the moderation of our friends the professors. Now, is nature really so moderate and considerate as they pretend?

In his *Science of Logic (Wissenschaft der Logik*<sup>3</sup>), Hegel says: "It is said that there are no sudden changes in nature, and the common view has it (*meint*) that when we speak of a growth or a destruction (*Entstehen oder Vergehen*), we always imagine a [80] gradual growth (*Hervorgehen*) or disappearance (*Verschwinden*). Yet we have seen cases in which the alteration of existence (des Seins) involves not only a transition from one proportion to another, but also a transition, by a sudden leap, into a quantitatively, and, on the other hand, also qualitatively different thing

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<sup>2</sup> "Nature does not make jumps."—editor.

<sup>3</sup> Hegel *Werke*, 2d ed., vol. iii, p. 434.

(*Anderswerden*); an interruption of the gradual process (*ein Abbrechen des Allmählichen*), differing qualitatively from the preceding, the former, state" (the italics are mine.—N. B.).

Hegel speaks of a transition of quantity into quality; there is a very simple illustration of such a transition. If we should heat water, we should find that throughout the process of heating, before a temperature of 100° C. (212° F.) is reached, the water will not boil and turn into steam. Portions of the water will move faster and faster, but they will not bubble on the surface in the form of steam. The change thus far is merely quantitative; the water moves faster, the temperature rises, but the water remains water, having all the properties of water. Its quantity is changing gradually; its quality remains the same. But when we have heated it to 100° C., we have brought it to the "boiling-point". At once it begins to boil, at once the particles that have been madly in motion burst apart and leap from the surface in the form of little explosions of steam. The water has ceased to be water; it becomes steam, a gas. The former quality is lost; we now have a new quality, with new properties. We have thus learned two important peculiarities in the process of change.

In the first place, having reached a certain stage in motion, the quantitative changes call forth qualitative changes (or, in more abbreviated form, "quantity becomes quality"); in the second place, this transition from quantity to quality is accomplished in a sudden leap, which constitutes an interruption in the gradual continuous process. The water was not constantly changing, with gradual deliberateness, into a little steam at a time, with the quantity of steam constantly increasing. For a long time it did not boil at all. But having reached the "boiling-point", it began to boil. We must consider this a sudden change.

The transformation of quantity into quality is one of the fundamental laws in the motion of matter; it may be traced literally at every step both in nature and society. Hang

a weight at the end of a string, and gradually add slight additional weights, each weight being as small as you like; up to a certain limit, the string "will hold". But once this limit has been exceeded, it will suddenly [81] break. Force steam into a boiler; all will go well for a while; only the pressure indicator will show increases in the pressure of the steam against the walls of the boiler. But when the dial has exceeded a certain limit, the boiler will explode. The pressure of the steam exceeded—perhaps by a very little—the power of resistance offered by the walls of the boiler. Before this moment, the quantitative changes had not led to a "cataclysm", to a qualitative change, but at that "point" the boiler exploded.

Several men are unable to lift a stone. Another joins them; they are still unable to do it. A weak old woman joins them—and their united strength raises the stone. Here, but a slight additional force was needed, and as soon as this force was added the job was done. Let us take another example. Leo Tolstoi wrote a story called "Three Rolls and a Cookie". The point of the story is the following: a man, to appease his hunger, ate one roll after another, for each still left him hungry; in fact, after his third roll, he was still hungry; then he ate a little cookie, and his hunger was appeased. He then cursed his folly for not having eaten the cookie first: for then he would not have had to eat the rolls. Of course, we are aware of his mistake; we are dealing here with a qualitative change, the transition from the feeling of hunger to that of satiation, which transition was accomplished in one bound (after eating the cookie). But this qualitative difference ensued after the quantitative differences: the cookie would have been of no use without the rolls.

We thus find that it is foolish to deny the existence of sudden changes, and to admit only a deliberate gradual process. Sudden leaps are often found in nature, and the notion that nature permits of no such violent alterations is merely a reflection of the fear of such shifts in society, i.e., of the

fear of revolution.

It is a characteristic fact that the earlier theories of the bourgeoisie, touching the question of the creation of the universe, were catastrophic theories, though naive and wrong ones. Such, for instance, was Cuvier's theory. This was displaced by the evolution theory, which introduced many new elements, but one-sidedly denied cataclysmic changes. Of such nature are the works of Lyell (*Principles of Geology*) in the field of geology. But at the end of the last century there again arose a theory which recognized the importance of sudden changes. For instance, the botanist De Vries (the so called mutation theory) maintained that from time to time, on the basis of previous changes, sudden alterations of form ensue, which later fortify themselves and become the starting points of new courses of evolution. The older views, which were hostile to "sudden changes", are now no [82] longer sufficient. Such notions (Leibnitz, for instance, says: "Everything in nature goes step by step, never by leaps and bounds"—*tout va par degres dans la nature et rien par saut*) evidently arose on a conservative social soil.

The denial of the contradictory character of evolution by bourgeois scholars is based on their fear of the class struggle and on their concealment of social contradictions. Their fear of sudden changes is based on their fear of revolution; all their wisdom is contained in the following reasoning: there are no violent changes in nature, there cannot be any such violent changes anywhere; therefore, you proletarians, do not dare make a revolution! Yet here it becomes exceptionally evident that bourgeois science is in contradiction with the most fundamental requirements of all science. Everybody knows that there have been many revolutions in human society. Will anyone deny that there was an English Revolution, or a French Revolution, or a Revolution of 1848, or the Revolution of 1917? If these violent changes have taken place in society, and are still taking place, science should not

"deny" them, refusing to recognize facts, but should understand these sudden shifts, and explain them.

Revolutions in society are of the same character as the violent changes in nature. They do not suddenly "fall from the sky". They are prepared by the entire preceding course of development, as the boiling of water is prepared by the preceding process of heating or as the explosion of a steam-boiler is prepared by the increasing pressure of the steam against its walls. A revolution in society means its reconstruction, "a structural alteration of the system". Such a revolution is an inevitable consequence of the contradictions between the structure of society and the demands for its development. We shall discuss the nature of this process below. For the present we need only to know the following: in society, as in nature, violent changes do take place; in society, as in nature, these sudden changes are prepared by the preceding course of things; in other words, in society as in nature, evolution (gradual development) leads to revolution (sudden change) : "The violent changes presuppose a preceding evolution, and the gradual changes lead to violent changes. These are two necessary factors in a single process."<sup>4</sup>

The contradictory nature of evolution, the question of cataclysmic changes, is one of the most essential theoretical questions. Though a [83] great number of bourgeois schools and tendencies oppose teleology and favor determinism, etc., they nevertheless stumble on these questions. The Marxian theory is not a theory of evolution but of revolution. For this very reason it is unacceptable to the ideologists of the bourgeoisie, and they are therefore ready to "accept" the whole theory except its revolutionary dialectics. Objections to Marxism usually assume the same form. Thus, Werner Sombart, a German professor, treats Marx

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<sup>4</sup> Plekhanov: *Criticism of Our Critics* (in Russian), 1906 edition, p. 104.

with great respect where evolution is involved, but at once attacks him as soon as he scents theoretically the revolutionary elements of Marxism. Entire theories are even built up, showing that Marx was a scholar in his evolutionary point of view, but ceased to be a scholar when he became—even theoretically—a revolutionist; he then leaves the sphere of science and gives himself up to revolutionary passions. P. Struve, once a Marxian, author of the first manifesto of the Russian Social-Democracy, a man later metamorphosed into a protagonist of pogroms and a prime counter-revolutionary ideologist, also began by attacking Marxism in its theory of cataclysmic changes. Plekhanov, then a revolutionist, wrote: "Mr. Struve wants to show us that nature makes no sudden leaps, and that the intellect (reason) will not bear such leaps. The fact is, Struve means his own intellect, which indeed tolerates no leaps, for the simple reason, as is said, that he cannot bear a certain dictatorship." (The italics are Plekhanov's; *Criticism of Our Critics*, p. 99.) The so called "organic school", the Positivists, Spencerians, evolutionists, etc., all oppose cataclysmic changes be-

cause they cannot bear a "certain dictatorship".

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Excerpts from  
*The Path to Socialism and Worker-Peasant Unity*,  
by Nicholai Bukharin, 1925.

*After the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks (communists) in November, 1917, there following 4 years of civil war and foreign intervention, which the Bolsheviks finally won. Faced with a devastated economy, the Bolsheviks inaugurated a policy called the NEP, for New Economic Policy. This policy tolerated capitalists in the cities, the so-called NEPmen, and the rural capitalists called "kulaks" in the countryside, where most people lived. ("Kulak" is Russian for "fist."). The NEP lasted until the end of the 1920s, when the Bolsheviks decided that the power of the kulaks was too dangerous to tolerate any longer and inaugurated the policy of "liquidation of the kulaks as a class." This meant the dispossession and deportation of the kulaks, which constituted about 4% of the rural population, and the collectivization of agriculture. Bukharin was an important leader in Bolshevik peasant policy in the 1920s, and advocated a conciliatory policy toward the kulaks. In 1929, however, he was politically defeated, and soon lost all influence. In the late Soviet period and afterward, some looked back to Bukharin's ideas as a promising "road not taken" in Soviet peasant policy. —editor.*



The more the national economy as a whole will progress, and the more quickly our state industry will grow, the more powerful will be the support for those strata of the peasantry whose standard of living will catch up to the prosperous top village class, but who at the same time will grow not at the price of exploitation, not at the price of someone else's labor, but by virtue of the improvement of the means of carrying on their economy and the unification of the efforts of a series of peasant households through cooperative organization which will, subsequently, be transformed more and more into a collective type of farming. In this manner the basic network of our co-operative peasant organizations will consist of cooperative cells not of a kulak but of a "laboring" type, cells growing in the system of our nation-wide organs and becoming thus links of a single chain of socialist economy. On the other hand, kulak co-operative nests will, of course, through banks, etc., grow in this same system; but they will be to an important degree foreign bodies, similar, for example, to concession businesses. What will [202] become of this kind of kulak cooperation later on? Let us suppose, for example, that we have a credit association headed by kulaks having full authority. This kulak cooperative, if it wishes to prosper, must of necessity be linked, like all the others, with the state economic organs; it, for example, will deposit its free cash in our banks to receive a fixed interest rate. Even if their own banking organizations should arise of a sort similar to the cooperative, nevertheless, inevitably they would have to be tied with the powerful credit establishments of the proletarian state, having at their disposal the basic credit resources of the country. In any event there will be nowhere for the kulak and the kulak organizations to go, for the general pattern of development in our country has already been determined as the system of the proletarian dictatorship, and that dictatorship's economic organizations are already in a significant stage of develop-

ment. If the kulak willy-nilly becomes a depositor in our banks, if he willy-nilly begins to be tied by a whole series of relations to our economic organs, then he inevitably will be squeezed into the defined framework.... To suppose that kulak farms will grow faster than the entire state industry would require supposing something directly opposed to reality. In the development of our national economy as a whole the already established large-scale industry, which is found wholly in the hands of the proletarian state, will develop fastest of all. This growth itself will determine everything and will serve as a sufficient guarantee that the kulak or the prosperous peasant, employing several agricultural workers, will have to submit to our general system....

In our country at present there are three classes of which two classes—the workers and peasants—are the basic classes of our society and of our system, but the third class—the bourgeoisie (kulaks, nepmen, etc.)—exists only so far as it is "tolerated" to a certain degree and on certain conditions "of collaboration" with the working class and the peasantry.... From that position, which the working class now occupies as the ruling class, emerges a whole series of fundamental conclusions for the policy of the workers' state. The basic and main conclusion, ... is the following: in the period of capitalism the task of the working class was the overthrow of society, [while] in the conditions of [203] the proletarian dictatorship the task of the working class is not the overthrow of the system of the proletarian dictatorship and the new society being created, but, on the contrary, all-out support of it, the strengthening of it, the guidance of it. From this, in their turn, other conclusions inevitably follow, namely conclusions concerning the very form of the class struggle in our society. The class struggle, as we know perfectly well, does not end and does not die out at once, but will continue for a very, very long time, as long as the division into classes does not

wholly disappear forever. But even now we see how the question concerning the main path of the class struggle and the question of the forms of that struggle inevitably change. In a capitalistic society, where the concern of the proletariat is in trying to overthrow that society, the constant task consists of every kind of aggravation and kindling of the class struggle until that class struggle assumes the fiercest of its forms, namely the form of civil war and armed struggle on the part of the toiling masses against the ruling capitalist regime.... The party of the working class within the capitalistic system is the party of civil war. The position is completely reversed when the working class takes power into its hands, basing itself on the broad strata of the peasantry. In so far as the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is smashed, and in its place has already arisen the dictatorship of the proletariat, the task of the working class becomes the strengthening of that dictatorship and the defense of it against any sort of encroachment. The party of the working class under such circumstances becomes the party of civil peace, i.e., it requires submission to the working class by the former ruling classes, strata and groups; it requires civil peace from them and the working class now prosecutes and punishes all disturbers of this civil peace, all conspirators, saboteurs—in a word, all who interfere in the matter of peaceful construction of the new society....

In accordance with this there appears also a change in the very forms of the class struggle. We shall illustrate this with a series of examples. We shall take, first of all, relations with the bourgeoisie. Under capitalism we extended the development of the struggle against it right up to the use of armed force. Of course, if the bourgeoisie attempted now to come out against [204] us with arms in hand just as it did in 1917, 1918, 1919, etc., we would immediately apply our armed force and make short work of such an opponent in a way that it would deserve. But now we are in a completely different position. The strength of the Soviet

power and its stability are so evident that the complete hopelessness of launching any active and sharp political struggle against the new system is perfectly obvious to the bourgeois strata of our society (the nepmen). Willy-nilly, these strata will have to make their peace with the existing order of things. Economic activity is permitted to this bourgeoisie within definite limits. In general we do not now prohibit private trade; we permit a series of private enterprises; we do not seal up private shops any more; we give these circles, therefore, a substantial possibility of existence. Does this mean that the class struggle has ended? No, by no means. But this struggle has very essentially changed its form. It continues to be conducted by the working class: our legislation, guaranteeing the workers' interests, ensuring the definite rights of trade unions, forcing the private owners to pay insurance rates, depriving these owner circles of electoral rights in the political organs of power, etc.—this is a new form of class struggle. The system of taxation, by which the income and profits of capitalistic enterprises are assessed, taxation of the bourgeoisie such as is not found in a single [other] country,—this is precisely a new form of class struggle. The competition from state industry, state trade, cooperatives—this again is a new form of class struggle. When our state gives special privileges and advantages to cooperative enterprises, when this state especially finances, i.e., subsidizes by monetary means, the cooperative organizations, when it through legislation provides broad rights for them,—all this is a new form of class struggle. If in the process of competition in the market place state industry, commerce, cooperatives gradually force out the private owner—that is a victory in the class struggle, but a victory not in a mechanical clash of strength, not through the help of armed seizure, but wholly within the new framework which did not exist earlier, which in the capitalist regime was completely unthinkable for the working class and the peasantry.

Exactly in this manner the form of the class struggle changes [205] in the countryside. True, here and there the class struggle in the countryside breaks out in its former manifestations, in which the aggravation is usually caused by kulak elements.... However, such instances usually occur where the local soviet apparatus is still weak.... Several years ago the main form of the class struggle in the countryside was direct administrative pressure on the top rural class: at first constant confiscation and requisition among the more prosperous peasantry and the transfer of this confiscated property to the use of the poverty-stricken (in the period of the Committees of the Poor).... While in the city from the very beginning of the new economic policy we permitted economic activity by the private traders and owners, in the country, as a matter of fact, the rural bourgeoisie were confronted with obstacles which severely restricted this activity or made it practically impossible. At present (summer, 1925) we are on the point of changing this system and we are giving great freedom of movement to the rural bourgeois elements. But this does not in the least mean that we are ceasing to carry on the class struggle against the rural bourgeoisie. This does not in the least mean that we refuse to support the poor and middle strata against the exploiting strata. We only are changing the form of our class struggle against the petty rural capitalists. We are turning to a new form of this class struggle, more expedient under the present circumstances.

In the city we do not at all seal up the shops of the private trader; we allow his "work." As a result we have a great revival of commodity circulation in the entire country. And this trader also becomes a buyer in our state industry and in our wholesale state trade; on the other hand he sells our wares in the various corners of our country—so long as our own state and cooperative commodity distribution network is very weak. By this, of course, he obtains commercial profit or a share of that commercial profit. But,

nevertheless, independently of his will he furthers—thanks to the general revival of commodity circulation and the growth of our state industry and growth of our state trade—the quicker turnover of the general capital of the country including the capital of our state industry and our state trade. For that reason the machine of production itself revolves faster, the process of [206] accumulation [of capital] goes faster, and for that reason the power of our state industry increases faster—that fundamental base, fundamental foundation, or socialist society. On the other hand, by taxing the bourgeois strata we at the same time obtain additional means which go into our state treasury. . . . Such a policy is thus a class policy on our part. This class policy has as its aim the support of the toilers against the remains of the exploitative world. But the form of this policy, the form of that class struggle, as we see, is completely different from that of simply sealing up the shops of the private traders....

Now we can also transfer such a policy to our countryside, persuading our rural workers not to practice the system of direct administrative "suppression" and "pressure" with respect to the more prosperous strata of the countryside. But again, does this mean that here we wish to give up the class struggle with this agricultural bourgeoisie? Not at all. Just as we do not give up the class struggle with the city bourgeoisie (the nepmen) when we permit it to occupy itself with its "interests," so the corresponding policy in the country by no means signifies the giving up of the struggle. We are only changing its form. Against the shops of the rural traders we have to employ not the organs of direct coercion and violence, but our excellent cooperative shops. Against the rural usurer who lends money at outrageous interest rates, or who rents his horse to the horseless peasant under bondage conditions, we should bring forward first and foremost a battery of our credit associations, an excellent organization of cheap cooperative credit and help on the part of the state power. Our merchan-

dise should be better and cheaper than the merchandise of the private trader, our credit loans should be larger and much cheaper than the loans which the usurer gives, the cooperative should trade better and be more accommodating to the local rural demand than private trade. These are the weapons we should bring to the front in our struggle with the exploiting elements of the countryside.

It is possible, however, to ask oneself: is it correct to transfer to the countryside such a policy which is suitable for the city? Of course, for this question there is an important and extremely substantial difference between the conditions of the economic [207] struggle in the city and the conditions of that economic struggle in the countryside. In the city we already have "the commanding heights" more or less well organized and working well; this, of course, is our heavy artillery in the struggle with the city nepmen. But where are such "commanding heights" in the countryside?...Will conditions not be such that the kulak elements will show themselves to be immeasurably stronger economically than the remaining peasantry and, by the same token, will they not be able to whip through us and consequently find themselves the directors and masters of all rural life?

To this quite valid question we must give this answer: the commanding height in relation to the rural bourgeoisie is the proletarian city. It is impossible to imagine a state of affairs wherein the countryside develops completely independently of the city. We have already said that with the growth of productive forces in the nation the influence of the city will be more and more decisive in the development of our agriculture. And the core of this city, its proletarian industry, its banking system, its legislation, etc., all this is a "turning of the face to the country," i.e., all this serves as the most powerful support to the middle and poor elements of the countryside, support against its kulak strata.

The connecting link between the proletarian city and the toiling countryside is

the cooperative system which stands exactly at the Junction between this city and countryside, itself embodying above all that economic bond between the working class and the peasantry, the strengthening of which is the basic task of the working class and our party.... Step by step state industry and state trade, uniting with the rural cooperative system, which, in turn, being extended from trade to production itself, will force out private capital; industrial, trade, and usurious. The peasant farms will be drawn into the general state-cooperative organization and will be absorbed through the various forms of cooperative organizations, primarily the producers' cooperatives, exactly as the petty artisans and handicraftsmen here [in the city] will be drawn in and absorbed....

The partial development of capitalistic relations in the country-side, which will occur in the immediate years ahead, will of [208] necessity, however, also call forth other forms of the class struggle besides the purely economic struggle, i.e., besides the struggle of various economic forms against each other.... The struggle between the kulak and the farm laborer involves questions concerning the conditions of hired labor (length of the work day, wages, forms of payment for work, general conditions of work, etc., etc.). But here also the class struggle of the farm laborers, who are a part of the working class now in power, has forms entirely different from those forms of the class struggle which had been peculiar to the capitalistic regime. This is because the farm laboring group, which on the kulak farm finds itself, so to say, under its master, at the same time, as a part of the ruling class, stands over him even though individual farm laborers have not realized this. In what does this fact find its expression? In that the entire legislation of our country is aimed at the exploiters and each of its paragraphs defends the interests of the workers, in that the trade unions of the working class and the trade unions of the farm laborers enjoy by law recognized rights such as they

do not have in a single capitalist country, in that the courts of our country punish employers for violation of these laws, etc., etc. For this reason the class struggle of the farm labor group in the final analysis is not at all directed towards ruining the farm of the kulak and dividing it among themselves. . . . The farm labor group carries on its class struggle in other forms, forcing proper conditions of work through its trade organizations and through its state power, the Soviet power, and it has recourse to the courts of its class if it is necessary to curb the farm owners....

In the final analysis the development of market transactions destroys itself because, in so far as through these market transactions ... the state industry and cooperatives absorb all the remaining economic forms and gradually squeeze them out to the end through the market, to that extent the market itself will sooner or later die out, for all will be replaced by state-cooperative distribution of manufactured products.

In that way our conception of the development towards socialism has been changed to a significant extent, but these changes do not express in the slightest a retreat from the proletarian [209] policy; on the contrary, they express the accounting of a colossal revolutionary experiment. For the first time we found in the new economic policy the correct combination between the private interests of the petty producer and the general interests of socialist construction. The new economic policy is not a betrayal of the proletarian line but the only correct proletarian policy. That has now become clearer than clear.

It is also possible to a certain extent to say of the bourgeoisie in capitalistic society that it, the bourgeoisie, was the leader of all society, its foremost and most educated class; but leadership by the bourgeoisie and leadership by the proletariat differ from each other in the sharpest, deepest, most fundamental manner. For the development of capitalistic society, at the head of which [211] stood the bourgeoisie, led to the

difference between the bourgeoisie on the one hand [and] the working class and the peasantry on the other, increasing and becoming more and more aggravated. It is impossible even to think that within the frame-work and limits of the capitalistic system the working class and the peasantry could achieve equality with the bourgeoisie in their material position, the level of their life, their education, their social position. This would contradict the most fundamental basis of bourgeois society. On the contrary, the very essence of this bourgeois society lies in its sharpest division into classes....: the bourgeoisie in the countries where it rules has a monopoly (i.e., exclusive ownership) not only of the means of production, factories, mills, railroads, etcetera; it has a monopoly not only over the state power, into which it allows no one; but it also has a complete actual monopoly over higher education, over the press (newspapers, magazines), over science, etc.... The bourgeoisie never set and could not set as its aim the uplifting, systematically and steadily, of the new peoples' strata towards a cultural life, for that would mean the downfall of its own power.

The working class pursues exactly the opposite, a completely different policy. Its goal is not the perpetuation of the same relationship between classes: its goal is the overcoming of class differences, the abolition of those class differences by re-educating the broad masses of the people; for that [purpose] it utilizes all the means at its disposal and all the might of its state power. The basis of that transformation is the transformation of the economic relationships of society, the development of that society on the path to socialism.... Attracting a larger and larger number of non-party peasants to soviet work and helping them in that work to re-educate themselves, to grow, to transform their nature, to acquire habits necessary for the affairs of public administration, to acquire an understanding not only of local but also of nationwide goals, etc., the working class by the same token gradually

begins to wipe out the boundary between itself and the foremost strata of the peasantry. Through these foremost strata other strata, new groups of peasants, will pass to a higher stage and will lift themselves to a new life, active and aware; [212] and, little by little, on the basis of the proletarian leadership, the peasantry will coalesce with the working class in its customs, habits, thoughts, hopes and aims. Likewise, through the co-operative the peasant economy will coalesce with the state economy of the proletariat and, in the final analysis, having remade itself, will flow into a single planned socialist economy, just as in all

walks of life the peasantry will grow together with the working class....

This will also be the destruction (dying away) of the proletarian dictatorship itself as "not wanted." But to arrive at that goal a persistent and firm policy is necessary, which, bearing that goal in mind, powerfully directs the course of social development. That is why at the present stage of development it is necessary to preserve in full the only actual guarantee of the correct policy, which guarantee is the system of the proletarian dictatorship, resting on the peasantry and being in an alliance with that peasantry.

Excerpt from  
"Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism"  
by N. Bukharin  
***Bolshevik*, no. 10, September, 1924.**

[9] Herr Hilferding recognizes that victory [in World War I] was obtained by Anglo-Saxon capital [of Great Britain and the United States]; Herr Hilferding is prepared to make friends both with the political and "spiritual" "Anglo-Saxon supremacy." And it is here that Herr Hilferding also begins to reveal the real social-democratic paradise.

Up to now, Marxism has asserted that wars are connected with capitalism by an unbreakable bond. But our "thinker" courageously does away with this "obsolete" view.

[10] At first he, winking at the "Anglo-Saxon" side with their beautiful "political and spiritual *habitus*,"<sup>5</sup> crawls on his belly to these "necessary" conclusions:

"The interests of the Anglo-Saxon governments, in particular the English, are connected more with consolidation and organization of territory already con-

quered, and not with new territorial expansion.... These interests.... are in full harmony with the interests of the democratic masses."

And further, still quite openly:

"Really capitalism actually means war, so can peace be assured only after overcoming it fully? Or else is it possible to create by means of consistent (!) policies, which organically unite different sovereignties in favor of supra-governmental organizations, new forms of peaceful political order? Is there not also here (?! H. B.) more room for evolutionary development than has been supposed up to now?

And Herr Hilferding gives us to understand that it is just he—speaking of evolution against revolution, for the "League of Nations" against separate sovereignties, for "Anglo-Saxon" "supremacy," "*habitus*," dollar and other good things against those events which are played in "Western Europe" (and about which he only scornfully

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<sup>5</sup> Physical and mental constitution or predisposition—editor.

tosses off a few words—yes, he is a “scrupulous,” respectable “investigator!”).

Thus, Rudolf Hilferding belatedly revives the [theory of] “ultra-imperialism” of Karl Kautsky, who preached this utopia at the beginning of the [First World] war. A remarkable “irony of history!” Before the war Kautsky also greatly admired English political “*habitus*,” considered English imperialism completely innocent, nothing less than a bastion of peace and reverence “for mankind.” And now, after Anglo-Russian-French preparations for war have been well documented, after peace (evidently also in the “evolutionary order”) has barely succeed and barely failed to be overwhelmed in blood, the thought of social-democratic theorists is brought back to its starting point, enriched dialectically in the course of forfeiting the last remnants of Marxist conscience.

Thus Herr Hilferding raises the question (and mutters an affirmative answer) of “ultra-imperialism.”

Generally speaking, this imperialist “union of unions,” “supra-state organization,” a single “world trust,” etc., could be realized in two ways:

Either by agreement; or by the struggle and victory of the strongest groups.

To hope for the first path is absurd. Since agreement is possible and real only when there is equality of forces, when [11] victory is beyond belief, when struggle is hopeless. But who will affirm that the forces are equal these days?

The second path is the path of victory. Hilferding “takes on the basis of the victory of the ‘Anglo-Saxons’;” Anglo-Saxon “supremacy” is *factually* the “League of Na-

tions.”

But this is also an illusion. Above all, because inside “supremacy” there is no unity, but further because there exist a million other contradictions, which make this “paradise”<sup>6</sup> quite illusory.

Excerpt from

B. Gessen and I. Podvolotskii,  
“The Philosophical Roots of Right Opportunism,” *Under the Banner of Marxism*, 1929, No. 9, p. 9.

The unity of opposites is not the prevalence of one opposite over another in the manner of Bukharin’s “antagonistic forces.” A correct understanding of the subject consists not in what sets the direction of its movement by the investigation of the direction of forces or disturbing of equilibrium, but understanding the unity of its contradictory structure.

Dialectical contradictions do not dissolve one another and do not neutralize one another. Similarly oppositely directed forces do not prevail over one another, but turn into one another, and this transition of every phenomenon, every process into its opposite constitutes the essence of all forms of movement of matter, a general law of its existence.

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<sup>6</sup> The word translated “paradise” is illegible in the Russian text—editor.