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Marxism

Scientific intelligentsia, social science and proletarian class consciousness

- Features - Ernest Mandel Archive - 1970: The Leninist Theory of Organisation -

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The massive reintroduction of intellectual labour into the process of production brought about by the third industrial revolution, which was foreseen by Marx and whose foundations were already laid in the second industrial revolution, [1] has created the prerequisite for a much broader layer of the scientific intelligentsia to regain the awareness of alienation which it had lost through its removal from the process of direct production of surplus value and its transformation into a direct or indirect consumer of surplus value. For it, too, is overcome by alienation in bourgeois society. This is the material basis not only for the student revolt in the imperialist countries but also for the possibility of involving increasing numbers of scientists and technicians into the revolutionary movement.

The participation of the intelligentsia in the classical socialist movement before the first world war generally tended to decline. Though it was considerable at the start of the movement, it became smaller and smaller as the organised mass movement of the working class became stronger. In a little known polemic against Max Adler in 1910, Trotsky revealed the causes of this process to be on the whole materialistic: the intelligentsia's social dependency on the big bourgeoisie and the bourgeois state; an ideological identification with the class interests it thereby serves; and the inability of the workers movement, organised as a "counter-society," to compete with its counterpart. Trotsky predicted that this would probably change very quickly, in a revolutionary epoch, on the eve of the proletarian revolution. [2]

From these correct premises, however, he drew what were already incorrect tactical conclusions, when for instance he failed to see the great importance which in 1908-1909 Lenin accorded the student movement (which was re-emerging in the middle of the victorious counter-revolution), considering it an albatross for the subsequent, new rise in the revolutionary mass movement (that was to begin in 1912).

He even went so far as to maintain that it was the "fault" of the leading revolutionary intelligentsia in the Russian Social Democracy if it was able to spread "its overall social characteristics: a spirit of sectarianism, an individualism typical of intellectuals, and ideological fetishism." [3] As Trotsky later admitted, he at that time under-estimated the *political and social significance* of the faction fight between the Bolsheviks and the Liquidators, which was only an extension of the earlier struggle between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. History was to show that this struggle had nothing to do with a product of "intellectual sectarianism," but with the separation of socialist, revolutionary consciousness from petty-bourgeois, reformist consciousness. [4]

It is correct, however, that the participation of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia in the building of the revolutionary class party of the Russian proletariat was still a pure product of individual selection without any social roots. And since the October revolution, this has inevitably turned against the *proletarian* revolution, for the masses of the technical intelligentsia were not able to go over to the camp of the revolution. At first they sabotaged economic production and the methods of social organisation on the broadest scale; then their co-operation had to be "bought" through high salaries; and finally they were transformed into the driving force behind the bureaucratisation and degeneration of this revolution. Inasmuch as the position of the technical intelligentsia (especially category 2 above) in the material process of production has today decisively changed, and since this technical intelligentsia is gradually being transformed into a section of the wage-earning class, the possibility of its massive participation in the revolutionary process and in the reorganisation of society stands on much firmer ground than in the past. Frederick Engels had already, pointed to the historically decisive role this intelligentsia could play in the construction of the socialist society.

In order to take over and put into operation the means of production, we need people, and in large numbers, who are

technically trained. We do not have them, . . . I foresee us in the next eight to ten years recruiting enough young technicians, doctors, lawyers and teachers to be in a position to let party comrades administer the factories and essential goods for the nation. Then our accession to power will be quite natural and will work itself out relatively smoothly. If, on the other hand, we prematurely come to power through a war, the technicians will be our main opponents, and will deceive and betray us whenever possible. We will have to use terror against them and still they will shit all over us. [5]

Of course, it must be added that in the course of this third industrial revolution the working class itself, which is much better qualified than in 1890, exhibits a much greater ability to directly manage the factories than in Engels' time. But in the final analysis, it is technical abilities that are required for the broad masses to be able to exert political and social control over the "specialists" (a matter about which Lenin had so many illusions in 1918). A growing union between the technical intelligentsia and the industrial proletariat, and the growing participation of revolutionary intellectuals in the revolutionary party, can only facilitate that control.

As the contradiction between the objective socialisation of production and labour on the one hand, and private appropriation on the other, intensifies (i.e., as the crisis of the capitalist relations of production sharpens) - and today we are experiencing a new and sharper form of this contradiction, which underlay the May 1968 events in France and the mass struggles in Italy in 1969 - and as neocapitalism seeks to win a new lease on life by raising the working class' level of consumption, science will increasingly become for the masses a revolutionary, productive force in two regards: With automation and the growing mountain of commodities, it produces not only a growing crisis in the production and distribution process of capital, which is based upon generalised commodity production; it also produces revolutionary consciousness in growing masses of people by allowing the myths and masks of the capitalist routine to be torn away, and by making it possible for the worker, reconquering the consciousness of being alienated, to put an end to that alienation. As the decisive barrier which today holds back the working class from acquiring political class consciousness is found to reside less in the misery of the masses or the extreme narrowness of their surroundings than in the constant influence of petty-bourgeois and bourgeois ideological consumption and mystification, it is precisely then that the eye-opening function of critical social science can play a truly revolutionary role in the new awakening of the class consciousness among the masses. Of course, this makes necessary the existence of concrete ties with the working masses - a requirement that can only be met by the advanced workers on the one hand and the revolutionary organisation on the other. And this also requires the revolutionary, scientific intelligentsia not to "go to the people" with the modest populist masochism that restricts it to humbly supporting struggles for higher wages but to bring the awakened and critical layers of the working class what they are unable to achieve by themselves, due to their fragmented state of consciousness: the scientist knowledge and awareness that will make it possible for them to recognise the scandal of concealed exploitation and disguised oppression for what it is.

[Next section](#)

[1] In his last work ("Zum allgemeinen Verhältnis von wissenschaftlicher Intelligenz und proletarischen Klassenbewusstsein," *SDS-Info*, No.2127 [Dec. 22, 1969]), Hans-Jurgen Krahl brought out "the Marx quotation on this question which we are reprinting here. (It comes from the unincorporated section "Sechstes Kapitel, Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses" in the draft of Chapter Six of Book One of the first volume of *Capital*, which was published for the first time, in the "Marx-Engels Archives" in 1933.) We should like to dedicate this article, which was intended to promote discussion and understanding with him, to this young friend who so tragically passed away.

"With the development of a real subsuming of labour under capital (or in the specifically capitalist mode of production) the real functionary in the overall labour process is not the individual worker, but increasingly a combined social capacity for work, and the various capacities for work, which are in competition with one another and constitute the entire productive machine, participate in very different ways in the direct process of creating commodities - or, more accurately in this sense, products - (one works more with his hands, another more with his head, one as a manager, an

engineer, a technician, etc., another as a supervisor, and a third as a simple manual labourer, or even a helper). As a result of this, the functions of labour capacity will increasingly tend to be classified by the direct concept of productive labour, while those who possess that capacity will be classified under the concept of productive workers, directly exploited by capital and subordinated to its process of consumption and production." (Karl Marx, *Resultate* [Frankfurt: Neue Kritik, 1969], p.66.)

[2] Leon Trotsky, *The Intelligentsia and Socialism* (London: New Park Publishers, 1966).

[3] Leon Trotsky, "Die Entwicklungstendenzen der russischen Sozioldemokratie," in *Die Neue Zeit* Vol.XXVIII, No.2 (1910), p.862.

[4] Already in his first polemical book against Lenin (*Nos taches politiques*, op. cit., pp.68-71, for example), Trotsky had undertaken an effort to represent the entire Leninist polemic against "economism" and the "handicraftsman's approach to organisation" in *What is to Be Done?* as a pure discussion between intellectuals, or at best an attempt to win over the best forces of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia to the revolutionary Social Democracy. He did not understand that it was a question of repelling the petty-bourgeois, revisionist influence upon the working class. His polemic against Lenin from 1903 to 1914 was characterised by an underappreciation of the catastrophic consequences of opportunism for the working class and the labour movement. Only in 1917 did he overcome this underappreciation once and for all.

[5] August Bebel, *Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Engels* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1965), p.465.