

Ten theses of Marxist-Leninist theory

From Downfall and Future of Socialism by Hans Heinz Holz

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1. Communists distinguish themselves from other supporters of socialism in that their conceptions of the future social order and the path leading to it are based upon a theory of history, historical materialism, the essence of which was worked out by Marx, Engels, and Lenin. The theoretical content of Marxism-Leninism is determined and enriched by practical political experience. The theory still retains the experiences of the workers' movement in the period of its formulation in the mid- nineteenth century. It reflects these struggles as they developed historically, including the controversies and contradictions. The truth content of the theory arises from the fact that consistent positions have been drawn from these struggles. Even wrong positions, later corrected, had not been adopted without reason; one must learn from them, just as one learns from all mistakes.

2. As a theory of history (drawing upon a comprehensive understanding of processes of nature and the relationship between nature and history, upon dialectics of nature and dialectical materialism), Marxism-Leninism, by its very essence cannot be a dogma but a theory that assimilates history. Where it became mere dogma it very quickly lost touch with reality. Loss of creative theoretical development led to errors in the development of its practice and false conclusions. The communist movement has experienced such errors in its theoretical development even while its creative development continued.

3. That a theory is capable of development does not mean that it can be changed in any *arbitrary* way. Marxism-Leninism would no longer be itself if it were to discard the recognition that all history is a history of class struggles. The basis of its scientific analysis of historical processes is the insight that the decisive driving force in history is the development of productive forces and their corresponding production relations, and that the development of productive forces proceeds in ever-present contradiction with the institutionalized stable form of production relations. Analysis of an existing social (and that includes political) situation and development of an appropriate political strategy depend on this insight and are based on the understanding of the general foundations and structural essence of the social formation, including its numerous particular operational mechanisms and contradictions. Indispensable to Marxism-Leninism is also dialectics, in its twofold aspect as a universal principle of the interconnectedness of the contradictory forms of motion and as a method of representing these contradictory forms of motion. This means that reality is a multifaceted unity: it is continually changing; its motion results from the mutual interaction of contradictions on each other; and in this motion the qualitatively new arises from the accumulation of quantitative changes. A basic understanding of Marxist-Leninist theory is that social consciousness is determined by social being. The contradictions of social being express themselves in social consciousness so that human beings confronted by the contradictions of social being arrive at their various individual positions on the basis of their interests, traditions, experiences, and understanding. Finally, basic contradictions manifest themselves in class positions.

4. Human beings are not the helpless objects of a fatalistic historical process, but are always the active subjects of history. Nonetheless human behavior, when guided exclusively or primarily by private interests and personal motivations, can have

unanticipated results. Opaque social structures change intended outcomes, as it were behind the backs of the individuals. Good will alone, therefore, does not suffice to make the world better; mere morality is not a political principle (no more than charity can remove the source of poverty); a theoretical understanding of the relation between individual and society is necessary. A political movement to change the world to reach a specific goal cannot succeed if it derives its strategy and actions simply from the desired outcome or a cross-section of average individual opinions. This would be to reproduce the errors of bourgeois conceptions of democracy. The desired change in society, whether through planned reforms with the final goal of revolutionary transformation or through a revolution, requires a theoretically guided organization, that is, a political party sustained by the collective will of its supporters. In order for the will of all to become a common will capable of being translated into action, individual members must subordinate themselves to the organizational form, reining in their individual particularities of course not without prior participation in forming that common will; this principle of discipline is a simple condition of survival and effectiveness for all revolutionary parties.

5. The basic contradiction of all class societies is the private appropriation of social wealth whatever the form of the relations of production. In previous historical stages, each change in the relations of production shifted only the structures of appropriation, and shifted the responsibility for the use of the social wealth from one class to another. With these shifts, the mechanisms of exploitation became ever more abstract and opaque. This abstraction has reached, under capitalism and especially in its highly developed, state-monopolistic, and transnationally organized form, this abstraction has reached a level in which the overwhelming part of humanity is excluded from the appropriation of surplus value and decisions about its use, and in which the mechanisms of the accumulation of capital, the creation and reinvestment of surplus value, have also become independent of the decision makers. The class interest of that class at whose expense and against whose self-interest social wealth is created lies in the alteration of property relations and, because it is the only class that is opposed to these structures of appropriation, the establishment of a new social order is its *historical mission*, which it has the possibility of achieving. The opposition between capital and labor establishes the identity of the *working class* (regardless of the differences in the character of the work performed by its members) as the class that is in a position to abolish the capitalist relations of production. To materialize itself in activity as a *class* (and not just a sum of individuals) and thereby become the subject of this historical mission it must acquire consciousness of the situation in which human beings in general and members of the working class in particular find themselves, that is, a *class consciousness*. Various levels of class consciousness will obviously arise from different experiences and not at all solely through theory; but class consciousness must always be grounded on the theory of class society and class struggle.

6. A new qualitative element in the development of the productive forces emerges in connection with the scientific and technological revolution. On the one hand, science and technology can today guarantee a generally high material standard of living if a just system of appropriation and distribution were institutionalized. On the other hand, science and technology also make possible the destruction of the human species and large parts of nature. Indeed, the humanity of the human species is threatened by genetic or psychophysical manipulation. The capitalist form of production relations, which makes the accumulation of capital and its private control and appropriation the law of motion of social life, cannot solve this contradiction. Rather, the contradiction is intensified many times in mass misery (as in the Third World), in the continually growing danger of war, and in mental impoverishment and the distortion of the free unfolding of the personality. Only a socialist society provides the perspective of a human future worthy of humanity.

7. The perspective of communism connects the objective laws of history, which are the laws of reproduction of human conditions of life, with the subjective striving of each person toward self-realization and happiness. *Self-realization*, however, is not conceivable without reference to and consideration of fellow human beings; self-realization is not the right of the fist of the individual at the expense of others but has its foundation in the insight that the individual can only be himself or herself in solidarity with others. *Solidarity* and consciousness of the *social nature of human beings*, that is, a socialist morality, underlie the program of the *Communist Manifesto*, that “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx and Engels, in vol. 6 of *MECW*, 506). In capitalist societies the new attitude toward life is formed in the struggle for socialism, in socialist societies, in the struggle for the construction of socialism. This struggle requires an organizational form: the theoretical understanding of the social and political processes of the present and the proposal of goals for the future must be worked out collectively by the members of an organization, mediated by them, and translated into political action. A communist party is the organization in which this occurs (including the errors that always occur in real-life decisions); as the “place” where the conception of a socialist future is proposed and where the present strategy is worked out with this conception in mind, it is the *revolutionary vanguard of the working class* (even in a nonrevolutionary period).

8. The historical mission of the working class and the task of the communist party therefore have two aspects: first, the abolition of private ownership of the means of production and thereby of the private appropriation of surplus value brings about the changes in the relations of production that have become necessary because the development of the forces of production in the scientific and technological revolution can no longer be sensibly controlled by private interests; a comprehensive plan for the entire society is required. Second, the working class in its struggle for self-determination against exploitation, oppression, and injustice brings about the goal of establishing a society in which free and equal citizens can develop their talents in full; only such a society, a communist society, can guarantee human rights.

9. The construction of socialism, with communism emerging from it, will be a long and contradictory process even after the abolition of the capitalist property relations. Presocialist forms of consciousness and behavior last long after the institutional changes, some for several generations. Class positions do not disappear in one fell swoop; that is, the class struggle also continues, most of all the struggle over the new socialist worldview; accordingly, theoretical work and ideological clarity acquire great importance. This is the more so, as the path to socialism does not run parallel and simultaneously in the world as a whole, but rather must be traversed by some socialist countries under conditions of competing systems in which the metropolitan centers of capitalism will still be economically stronger. Thus the construction of socialism essentially depends upon the communist party *giving leadership to the social development and providing guidance to other social forces* in the socialist countries. This leading role must not be permitted to solidify into bureaucratic mechanisms (a danger to which it is subject at all times), but must be achieved and maintained with political power.

10. It is well to remember the insight of Karl Marx that “no social formation is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed” (Marx, in vol. 29 of *MECW*, 263). Capitalism today, in the development of its productive forces, begets external contradictions to the point of threatening the extinction of humanity in this respect it prepares in its womb the transition to socialism. However, capitalism is still capable of organizing within its own framework the continued development of the forces of production, even though with increasing deterioration of the quality of life. For this reason, the struggle against capitalism is still the main task of

communists throughout the world.