

Fall of an Ideology, Some Intellectual  
Implications of the Breakdown  
of the Marxist Paradigm.

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Marxism remained the official ideology of Soviet Union for over seventy years. During this period Soviet Union worked continuously to create as many satellites in Eastern Europe and other places throughout the world as it could. The entire might of an empire was thrown behind an ideology and its preaching was conducted with a missionary zeal unparalleled in the history of political ideologies. The recent breakdown of the Soviet Empire, therefore, signals not only a global political change but also an indirect refutation of Marxism or, at least, the European models of it, by history itself. This refutation of Marxism by history has implications regarding the ideological alternatives available to the West and to the Third World in our times. These implications constitute the focus of this paper. In part I of the paper I present a brief outline of the core theories of Marxism. In part II the implications of the recent indirect refutation of Marxism by history are worked out in terms of the ideological alternatives available to the world in a post-Marxist era. In this regard I attend both to the Western as well as the Third World perspectives.

I

THE CANONICAL CORE OF MARXISM

It is generally believed that three theories, i.e., historical materialism, the theory of classes, and the labour theory of

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value constitute the canonical core of Marxism.(1) A brief outline of each one of them is presented here, so that the subsequent discussion is placed in perspective and the ordinary reader has a rough idea regarding the structure of the ideology that has fallen. Let us begin with historical materialism.

1. Historical Materialism : The materialist conception of history constitutes the foundation of Marxism. The fundamental claim of this conception is that the material mode of production of a people makes for the basis of the rest of their social life. This economic basis 'conditions' the rest of the institutions of the society. In the preface to *A Critique of Political Economy* Marx says :

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life-process in general.(2)

For Marx, therefore, the relations of production constitute the economic structure of a society. The 'productive forces' in a society shape these relations of production. What needs to be clarified, therefore, is the nature of these 'productive forces', according to Marx, and the way they shape the relations of production. As pointed out by Allen Wood, the productive forces include tools and instruments, raw materials and other physical necessities of production, as well as the knowledge and skills of those who produce. Indeed, 'the revolutionary class' and the mode of social co-operation prevalent at a definite industrial stage are also included by Marx and Engels in the list of productive forces.(3)

It is a basic tenet of historical materialism that the productive forces determine material production by shaping division of labour in a society. Marx says : "Labour is organized, is

divided differently according to the instruments it has at its disposal. The hand mill presupposes a different division of labour from the steam mill".(4) The idea here is that the efficient employment of a certain type of instruments requires a certain type of division of labour. Hence, societies generally tend to adjust their division of labour to their respective productive forces.

Marx and Engels are of the opinion that corresponding to every stage in the development of labour, there is a specific form of property. In *The German Ideology* they say : "The different stages of development in the division of labour are just so many forms of property, i.e., the existing stage of the division of labour also determines the relations of individuals to one another with reference to the materials, instruments, and products of labour".(5) The division of labour, therefore, shapes not only the form of property in a society but thereby determines the social position of different groups, particularly, regarding the means of production. This goes to make for a social organization.

As far as the state is concerned, it is simply an expression of the civil society, according to Marx.

One may ask at this stage how does Marx explain the changes which occur in the relations of production or economic structures during the passage of history. Marx addresses this issue in terms of the limitations of a given system of the relations of production in a society to sustain the natural expansion of its productive forces. In his own words, "From forms of the development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution".(6) With the expansion and growth in the productive powers of man, the existing form of economic structure can no longer channelize them. The resulting conflict leads to the birth of a new system of production relations as well as its corresponding social organization. Historically "Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society".(7)

It is important to realize, however, that Marx believes that certain systems of production relations, such as capitalism, promote the growth and expansion of the productive forces very effectively and, hence, can make themselves obsolete rather quickly.

This, then, is the materialist conception of history in very rough and broad outline. It must be noted here, though, that more recent commentators of Marx take great pains to show that it is wrong to interpret historical materialism as 'economic determinism'. Allen Wood argues, for example, that it is false to interpret Marx as saying that "people's thoughts and actions, their political behaviour as well as their moral, religious and philosophical convictions, are all causally determined by economic facts, while these actions and convictions themselves exercise no influence whatever on the economic situation".(8) Wood points out that as early as *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels recognized that there is a 'reciprocal action' between the economic facts and the rest of the social and political institutions.(9) The fundamental thing, however, is that the economic facts are the primary causal agents, according to the materialist conception of history.

2. Theory of Classes : The Marxian theory of social classes is closely related to historical materialism. Indeed the fundamental vehicle of social change in history is the struggle between various social classes, according to Marxists. As noted above, there comes a time when expansion in the productive forces of a society can no longer be effectively channelised by the existing production relations and a conflict arises. The fundamental vehicles of such conflicts, according to Marx and Engels as well as a host of other Marxist thinkers, are the social classes. It is important, therefore, to get a clear idea regarding the Marxist understanding of a social class and the struggle between classes.

It is important to note that Marx does not define classes in terms of property and wealth or absence thereof. For Marx classes are generated by the production relations because these relations create groups "with common situation, common interests".(10) Here Marx is, obviously, not talking about the

interests of individuals belonging to a group. What goes to constitute, partially, a social class are the common 'general' interests of a mass of people. I say 'partially' because Marx does not consider community of interest as enough to constitute a social class. For him a mass of people need to be politically organized to promote and protect its general interests before it can be called a class in the real sense. This type of political organisation may be carried out under the banner of a class ideology whose function is to get people committed to their general interests. However, the members of a class may or may not know the connection between their interests and the political movement which represents them.(11)

Since a social class arises out of the general common interests created by the relations of production prevalent in a society, it is natural that there is a conflict (contradiction) between such interests of different groups. For example, the capitalist and the wage labourer, or, the landowner and the serf belong to different situations and interests. Their interests conflict and thereby demarcate them as social classes of modern society.

According to Marx, classes tend to defend their interests generally. Obviously this would happen only when they have become classes in the true Marxian sense, which requires, among other things, organization under a political movement. But once this has happened, the class struggle continues. In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels say :

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman — in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes.(12)

So the entire passage of human history, all progress in it, is the result of class struggle. It is this struggle which eventually displaces the existing production relations of a society, because they can no longer accommodate the growth in its production forces, and replaces them with newer ones. Marxists call it the dialectical movement of history. It is in this context that we must view what Marx and Engels said about the expected fall of capitalism at the hands of the proletariat and its replacement by a socialist order in which the means of production are not owned by the individual but belong to the state. Needless to point out that capitalism did not fall either in the 19th century in which Marx lived or in the 20th century which, contrary to Marxist expectations, became witness to the fall of most socialist states that had come to be. Of course, I will return to this matter again.

3. The Theory of Surplus Value : Marx's discussion of surplus value has many aspects to it and is spread all over his *Capital*. I will be concerned only with that aspect of his theory which has to do with the production of surplus value, and that too, very briefly.

In order to understand the production of surplus value, we need to understand the notion of commodity in Marx's view. He defines 'commodity' as anything which satisfies human wants and is produced by human labour for the purposes of exchange. Now every commodity, according to Marx as well as Adam Smith, has a 'use value' and an 'exchange value'. The use value of a commodity has got to do with the specific human wants that it can satisfy. It is its natural capacity to satisfy them. The exchange value, on the other hand, is its social capacity for exchange with other commodities in certain ratios.(13) Given these notions, Marx argues that in capitalistic production the exchange value of a commodity is proportional to the amount of labour time socially expended on it in order to create its determinate use value. This is Marx's 'law of value'.(14)

Now the capitalist spends money on two things, the means of production, and the labour power. The value of the means of production does not increase in the production process. This is

Marx's 'constant capital',  $c$ . The capital spent on the labour power is the 'variable capital',  $v$ . Marx believes that in the capitalistic mode of production, the wages paid to the labourer are only a part of the use value of the labour power, i.e., the total labour time. The unpaid labour is called 'surplus labour' by Marx. It is the value created by surplus labour which Marx calls 'surplus value',  $s$ . The labour process transforms the value of capital from  $v + c$  to  $v + c + s$ .(15)

The whole purpose of the capitalistic production is to increase profits or the rate of surplus value,  $s/v$ . The capitalist has an advantage over the labourer since he owns the means of production. This advantage is used by him, as far as possible, to increase the rate of surplus value. This is how he exploits the labourer.

## II

### IMPLICATIONS OF THE FALL OF MARXISM

The immediate as well as the long term intellectual implications of the fall of Marxism are going to be tremendous. The first area that needs to be attended to in this regard is that of ideological alternatives available to us in the post-Marxist era. One can, obviously, take two perspectives on this important issue, i.e., a Western perspective, and a Third World perspective. I will take them up one by one.

1. Western Perspective on the Post-Marxist Ideological Alternatives : The fall of the socialist authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe and, finally, the fall of the Soviet Union has been viewed as a great ideological victory by the so-called developed democracies of the West, particularly the United States. For over four decades during the Cold War era the fundamental ideological confrontation within the Western civilization was between the liberal democracies and free market economies of the so-called free world on the one hand, and the authoritarianism and controlled economies of the communist block on the other. This ideological confrontation, of course, was exported by the West to the rest of the world as well. But it must be emphasised that

it was primarily a struggle between two ideological paradigms within the Western civilization. The fall of the Soviet empire and its satellites is, therefore, naturally viewed as a victory of the democratic paradigm over the Marxist one. It obviously is.

The basic question, however, is : what are the theoretical consequences of this victory for the West and for the rest of the world from a Western perspective? It seems that two schools of thought have emerged on this issue so far. The first school seems to claim that since the predicted downfall of liberal capitalism did not materialise, and since the purported alternative has itself fallen, it, i.e., liberal capitalism, is perhaps the final form of human society. This actually is a revival of what we may describe as political Hegelianism. Francis Fukuyama is the best known spokesman of this school. In the second school of thought I include all those who oppose Fukuyama's political Hegelianism. In fact there is no single overriding theory here. The only common denominator of this group is its opposition to political Hegelianism. Various people in this group argue that the vacuum created by the destruction of the Marxist paradigm would be filled by new ideologies and radical political adjustments both within the West and the rest of the world.

Fukuyama argues that with the fall of the Marxist paradigm and the ascendancy of the democratic one, we might have reached "the end point of man's ideological evolution and the universalization of the Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government".(16) This obviously is a major metaphysical claim. One might call this claim pluralistic because of its commitment to democracy as the final form of government. This would be justified because democracy is basically a system which allows a plurality of opinions within its framework. However, it is also clear that insisting upon its being a final system of government means that there are no viable alternatives to it. Such a claim would be metaphysical if we interpret it as saying that human history has unfolded all possible alternatives already and there is nothing left in its womb; and, hence, we are left with the democratic paradigm only. Fukuyama seems to suggest this. He seems to suggest, on empirical

grounds, that human history has already witnessed "the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism".(17)

While commenting on this Fukuyamian position, Plattner says :

The collapse of communism and the manifest failure of various authoritarian brands of Third Worldism have resulted in the absence of a single non-democratic regime in the world with wide appeal. These events have also led to a drastic weakening of openly anti-democratic forces within the democratic regimes. Just as the defeat of fascism led to the virtual disappearance of the anti-democratic Right in the West, so the downfall of communism seems to be causing the withering away of the anti-democratic Left.(18)

Without endorsing the metaphysical leanings of Fukuyama's position, therefore, Plattner wants to claim that, at a practical level, there are no viable alternatives to the Western liberal democracy after the collapse of communism. He also doubts the viability of nationalism, what he calls the fundamentalist Islam, and a 'reinvigorated' communism as alternatives to liberal democracy; although regarding Islam, he says "it is probably the most vital alternative to democracy to be found anywhere today".(19)

As far as Plattner's comments on nationalism, reinvigorated communism, and the so-called fundamentalist Islam as well as the Third World in general are concerned, my response to them emerges in our discussion of the Third World Perspective. Let me deal here with the metaphysical aspect of Fukuyama's position. As a metaphysical claim, I think, this position cannot be taken seriously. True that logically the only alternative to a democratic paradigm is an authoritarian one. Hence, the breakdown of the authoritarian Marxist alternative of our era seems to suggest as if we have reached the end of the road as far as the ideological evolution is concerned. This, however, is an entirely mistaken view of the situation. There can be a lot

of different forms that democracy can assume, and, the same goes for authoritarianism. Indeed, logically the number of the possible forms of democracy and authoritarianism is infinite. Hence, it is ridiculous to assume that we have already seen "the end point of human ideological evolution". The democratic and the authoritarian alternatives can both assume new forms and emerge in human history again and again. Nothing in logic and metaphysics can run against that possibility. I believe, therefore, that taken as a metaphysical claim Fukuyama's position is unacceptable.

As far as the empirical situation is concerned, it seems reasonable for Plattner to claim that the fall of Marxism has weakened the authoritarian forces within the democratic regimes of the West as well as in the Third World.

The opponents of Fukuyama, as noted above, argue that the vacuum created by the breakdown of the Marxist paradigm would be filled by new ideologies and radical adjustments in international politics. Ken Jowitt, for example, has taken this line. He considers the present unrivalled ascendancy of 'liberal capitalism' only a temporary effect of the fall of Marxism. In his opinion with the passage of time the West "will regularly witness the rise of both internal and external movements dedicated to destroying or reforming it — movements that in one form or another will stress ideals of group membership, expressive behaviour, collective solidarity, and heroic action".(20) Cold rationalism of liberal democracy, Jowitt argues, does not address itself to the deeper instincts and emotions of man.

Jowitt's claim seems to have two sides to it. Firstly, he feels that the removal of the Soviet imperial power from the global scene would unleash a lot of territorial and ethnic conflicts throughout the world. This, he feels, is not unprecedented. The eclipse of the British Empire after World War II resulted in a series of problems and conflicts, some of which like Indo-Pakistani and Arab-Israeli conflicts, still continue. Hence we should expect similar consequences from the fall of the Soviet Empire.

I think this point of Jowitt is well taken. Already a very serious conflict, with long term consequences, is taking shape in the Balkans in the form of the 'Ethnic Cleansing' of the Bosnian Muslims at the hands of Serbs in former Yugoslavia. There are so many territorial and ethnic conflicts within CIS. And just as in the Gulf recently, the absence of the Soviet Empire may also lead to regional instability.

Jowitt's second point seems to be primarily about human psychology. Affairs of men have seldom been governed by cold rationalism alone. Indeed, the conflict between reason and emotions is one of the fundamental conflicts of human life. Therefore, while it would be a mistake to identify liberal democracy with rational governance *simpliciter*, one might expect that both reason and emotion would continue to influence the affairs of men as far as their ideologies of governance are concerned. Hence, the emergence of new perspectives. It seems more reasonable to take the present one-paradigm ideological situation of the world as a transitional period only. The vacuum created by the fall of the Marxist paradigm is going to be filled by new ideologies throughout the world, including the West. The Fukuyamian position that mankind has reached the "end point of its ideological evolution" is both metaphysically naive and one-sided.

2. The Third World Perspective on the Post-Marxist Ideological Alternatives: For a long time now, a lot of the intellectuals both in the Third World and the West kept arguing that there were only two ideological alternatives available to mankind, i.e., Capitalism and Marxism. We have no other alternative. The whole history of mankind was explained by these intellectuals in terms of these two ideas. That which did not fit into this framework was rejected as irrelevant or marginal. The traditional cultures and world views throughout the world were placed under tremendous intellectual and political pressure to concede ground to these ruling ideas of the West. The West possessed, and still possesses, the military and economic might to ensure that its 'epistemological imperialism' reigned supreme.

With this background in view, it is not surprising to note that the Third World has responded to the breakdown of the Marxist paradigm with mixed feelings. Four distinct responses or schools of thought can be noted in this regard. There are those in the Third World who feel disillusioned and confused. They are the Leftist intellectuals of various breeds. Then we have ideologies of the kind predicted by Jowitt which would be nothing unusual.

From this brief discussion one might conclude that among the Western ones are those who are rather happy at the fall of Marxism because they always had advocated liberal democracy and economics and view the current situation as their victory. These are the advocates of Westernisation. The third response is characterised by the feeling that the fall of Marxism has provided the Third World with the intellectual space in which it can slowly work out its epistemological liberation from the clutches of Western ideologies and, ultimately, become culturally autonomous. One might call this opinion Cultural Autonomism. The fourth response is the Chinese one. This is characterised by a process of reforms within the Chinese model of Marxism.

As far as the disillusioned and confused group, i.e., the old Leftist intellectuals, is concerned, they are slowly and, most of the time, tacitly converting to either Westernism or Cultural Autonomism. They, obviously, cannot hold their ground any longer. Hence, there is not much that I have to say about them. Also the fate of the Chinese reformism is hard to predict at this stage of the game. It is not clear whether these reforms would ultimately leave any recognisable element of Marxism in the Chinese society or not. This difficult case demands a study of different scope and order and hence, I skip it here. However, apart from China, the real struggle throughout the Third World in the days to come would be between the Cultural Autonomists and the Westernists. Let us consider these two ideological alternatives one by one.

Among the Cultural Autonomist I include all those shades of opinion in various Third World countries which stem from a

fundamental belief in the independent status of the Third World civilizations and their respective modes and forms of knowledge. Take the example of Muslims for a moment. All those who believe and work for the independent status of Islamic civilization and recognize the methods and forms of knowledge specific to it would be Cultural Autonomists. Obviously this would include a lot of different shades of opinion. Islamic fundamentalism, Islamic revivalism, and Islamic Modernism, in all their forms, would fall under the rubric of what I call Cultural Autonomism. Various shades of opinion in Hinduism and Confucianism as well as African and Latin American cultures can be similarly understood.

It must be noted that I do not consider all forms of Cultural Autonomism as intellectually acceptable. From my point of view all cultural institutions and traditions need to be evaluated rationally and critically before they can be made the basis of our actions, policies, and epistemologies. However, the fundamental premise of Cultural Autonomism that the civilizations of the Third World can stand on their own epistemologies seems unquestionable to me; though I do not argue this matter here. I must warn my reader, however, that epistemological independence of cultures does not mean their epistemological isolation.

Given this understanding, it seems to me that the vacuum created by the demise of Marxism would be filled by various forms of Cultural Autonomism in the Third World. In other words Cultural Autonomism appears to be the future paradigm in the Third World. One might ask at this point as to what would be the attitude of the political movements falling under this paradigm vis-a-vis democracy and authoritarianism. This, obviously, is an important question. Now it seems to me that if we grant that the democratic and authoritarian leanings have been present in all the important civilizations of the world and are not simply a Western 'discovery', then it would be easy for us to realize that some forms of Cultural Autonomism would be compatible with democracy. This is not to deny, of course, that authoritarian tendencies would also be present.

Let us take brief note of the fate of Westernism in the Third World now. Needless to point out that in the post-colonial era, most Third World countries have been governed by their Westernised elite. Some among them occasionally paid lip service to some form of Cultural Autonomism as well. Generally, however, they lacked the intellectual capacity to liberate their countries epistemologically. In this group are included democrats, some nationalists, and some earlier leftists.

This elite is still effectively in power in most of the countries. But now they are coming under increasing pressure from various breeds of Cultural Autonomism. Their vulnerability has increased because of the general failure of their economic and political policies in the past few decades. It seems to me that Westernism will have to yield to Cultural Autonomism in the days to come. However, it would be unfortunate if Western powers come to its rescue under the leadership of United States. Such an effort would place United States and its Allies in the same unflattering position in which they found themselves during the Cold War era — busy trying to protect unpopular and, many times, autocratic regimes.

It seems that the Western powers would tend to defend Westernism in the Third World. For one thing they would find it rather natural to continue to defend their economic and political interests through their old allies in these countries. For another West has generally tended to be epistemically ethnocentric. This epistemic ethnocentrism may blind the West to the viability of the conceptual categories used by the Cultural Autonomists in formulating problems and their solutions in the context of Third World cultures. But this is not the place to pursue this issue further. It suffices to note that, in the Third World context, things are increasingly tending to identify progressive outlook with Cultural Autonomism rather than Westernism.

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