

CHAPTER II

THE DIVISION OF UNITY, THE DISCLOSURE OF ESSENTIAL OPPOSITES

ALL PROCESSES that originate in nature and society are found in uninterrupted mutual action. In one way or another they are mutually linked up and influence each other. But in order to get to understand any one of them, to investigate the course of its development, to establish the character of its mutual action with other processes, it is no use to proceed only from the action of external forces on a given phenomenon, as do the mechanists, but it is necessary to lay bare its *internal* contradictions.

The fact that all phenomena in the world contain within themselves a number of contradictory aspects and properties was noticed long ago and is still noticed every day and reflected in people's thoughts and notions. But these opposing aspects were and are reflected in different ways. The eclectics, who see the opposing aspects of some process but do not know how to expose their internal connection and mutual relationships, grasp at now one, now another of its opposing factors, according to their point of view or to the changing situation, and whatever aspect they select they advance as the general characteristic of the whole.

Another group of philosophers holds that contradictions belong only to the surface of processes, to their appearance; that there are none within the essence of things. Therefore from their point of view a true notion cannot contain a contradiction within itself. Thus, as we saw, thought the Eleatics, Parmenides and Zeno; thus think metaphysicians

of all times. Certain liberal thinkers of the '90's, for example, could not deny a number of contradictions in the economic order which existed in the Russian countryside and were expressed in the progressive land-deprivation of part of the peasantry, in seasonal occupations, in the contradictions between the dealer and the home craftsman, etc. But these contradictions were regarded by them, not as the expression of the development of peasant economy along the capitalist path, but as phenomena that were external and fortuitous with regard to the countryside, which had retained its primordial communal character all the time.

It is only the materialist-dialectician who does not have to give confusing answers when called on to explain how it is possible to make contradictory assertions about the same thing, who does not have to explain the contradictions of a process as lying merely on the surface of phenomena or existing merely in our thought. Only dialectical materialism proceeds from the objective contradictions of actuality, from the internal struggle of the opposing aspects of a process, proceeds as it were from the law of the change and development of actuality itself.

Lenin wrote:

“The division of the one and the knowledge of its contradictory parts . . . is the essence (one of the essential aspects of being, its fundamental, if not *the* fundamental characteristic) of dialectic. This is exactly how Hegel puts the question.

“The condition for understanding all world processes as in ‘self-movement,’ in spontaneous development conceived in its vital and living forms—is the knowledge of the unity of their opposites. Development is in fact the conflict of opposites.”

Even in a simple mechanical impulse we find this contradiction in an elementary primitive form, in the form of action and counter-action, but in this the source of self-movement is not yet revealed because mechanics seeks the

cause of movement outside the object in motion. Mechanical movement is always only one aspect, one external form of the self-movement of concrete phenomena.

The class struggle in the history of society, the contradiction between productive forces and the relations of production show clearly enough the correctness of this law in relation to the development of social structures. It is the same in natural processes also.

Modern science no longer regards the atom as an unalterable, self-identical “brick of the universe,” a final limit to the division of physical matter. It has shown the atom to be a unity of centres of positive and negative electricity, which by their mutual penetration determine the physical and chemical properties of the atom. Nay, more, physicists and chemists have closely and critically examined the basis of the historic view of the nature of chemical elements, which a few decades ago appeared to be absolutely fixed. They have been able to show that their nature is not fixed. Chemical elements develop and the internal cause of their development is the movement of the internal contradiction of their atoms.

The dialectical character of the processes of nature emerges with special clarity in regard to the phenomena of life. Life and death, emergence and annihilation, assimilation and dissimilation (accretion and discharge of matter and of energy) are found to be side by side and to interpenetrate each other both in the life of organisms and in the life of every component cell.

The contradictory unity of variability and heredity displayed by the organism in the struggle for existence is the mainspring of organic evolution.

In the history of technique also we deal with development on the basis of the internal contradictions found in any given social-economic structure, contradictions which determine the course of its self-development. Thus in the development of machinery we meet with the emergence of contradictions between the machine and the material of which it is made and the solution of these contradictions by

the construction of machines out of more suitable materials—out of metal instead of wood—(originally machines were wooden), out of high quality steels, out of hard alloys, out of plastic material which can be easily moulded, etc., by the transition to new types of machines, by increasing the power of the old, etc. We have also a continual contradiction between the motive machine that provides the power, the transmissive mechanism and the machine that does the work at the “tool” end of the process.

We have contradictions between the technical bases of the different productive branches. Thus when the perfection of the loom in England at the end of the eighteenth century revealed and intensified the backwardness of spinning, the contradiction was solved by the appearance of the spinning machine, which in its turn made weaving backward; this new contradiction led to the appearance of Cartwright’s loom. The contradiction between the appearance of the new machines and the handcraft methods of their production brought forth the appearance and development of a new branch of production, machine-construction. These technical revolutions in industry led in turn to a contradiction with the backward transport system (sailing ships and horse wagons) and that evoked the railway and the steamship.

Contradictions of such a type exist all the time. An invention which arises as the result of the accumulation of preceding technical and social development is grafted on to the older technique when conditions are favourable, and leads to new contradictions, to be resolved by new inventions. It is in this way that technical progress is achieved.

The unity of opposites, the division of unity is the universal law of the development of our thinking. Lenin wrote:

“Knowledge is the eternal endless approximation of thought to the object. The reflection of nature in man’s thought must not be understood in a ‘dead manner’ ‘abstractly,’ without movement, without contradiction,

but as an eternal process of movement, as the emergence of contradictions and their resolution.”

Our knowledge of the objective world, as we have said already, moves between the poles of relative and absolute truth. At every stage of social development our knowledge is relative, because it is conditioned by the historic degree of the development of practice. But we move on the whole towards absolute truth, reflecting at every stage of our relative knowledge more and more of the aspects of absolute truth.

Our ideas, in proportion to the development of human knowledge and its closer approximation to reality, become more and more flexible, and therefore more and more adequate to reflect the universal connection, the division of unity, the conflict of opposites in objective actuality.

Each one of the general categories of materialistic dialectic which reflect the degrees of man’s knowledge of the laws of development of actuality presupposes its own opposite; thus, quality is unthinkable without quantity, content without form, possibility without actuality. Such categories are more and more seen to embody the principle of the unity of opposites.

Lenin in his fragment “On Dialectic” emphasizes the fundamental importance of the division of unity as follows:

“This aspect of dialectics customarily received very little attention (e.g. by Plekhanov): the identity of opposites is taken as the sum-total of examples, for example ‘a seed,’ and in Engels’s, for example, ‘primitive communism.’ But this is in the interest of popularization and not as the law of *knowledge* (and as the law of the objective world.)”

The “seed” is taken as an example of development through contradictions, for the seed dies that a new plant may live, then the plant dies that the new seed may live. “Primitive Communism,” too, is only able to develop into

civilization through the appearance within it of inequalities which are at one and the same time a forward step and a retrogression.¹

But while Engels gave these examples in order to make the law of opposites more easily understood, Plekhanov used them because he did not understand the unity and conflict of opposites and could only deal with instances without proceeding to explain the underlying law itself.

In one of his works Plekhanov wrote:

“Now here is a point we must examine. We already know, that Überweg was right—and in what measure he was right, when he demanded from logically thinking people a definite answer to the definite question as to whether a given object possessed a given property. But imagine that we are dealing not with a simple object, but a complex one, which unites in itself directly opposite phenomena and therefore combines in itself directly opposite properties. Does Überweg’s demand apply to pronouncements on such an object? No, Überweg himself—although he opposes the Hegelian dialectic—finds that here it is necessary to make use of a new principle, in fact the principle of the combination of opposites.

“One more point has to be considered. We know already that Überweg was right, and we know how right he was, in demanding that those who think should think logically, and in demanding definite answers to definite questions as to whether this or that characteristic attaches to this or that object. Now, however, let us suppose that we have to do with an object which is not simple but complex and has diametrically conflicting properties. Can the judgment demanded by Überweg be applied to such an object? No, Überweg himself, just as strenuously opposed as Trendelenburg to the Hegelian dialectic, considers that in this case we must judge in accordance with another rule, known in logic under the name of *principium coincidentiae oppositorum* (the principle of the

¹ See a long note by Lenin in vol. xiii. of his *Works*, p. 322.

coincidence of opposites). Well now, the immense majority of the phenomena with which natural science and sociological science have to do come within the category of such objects. The simplest globule of protoplasm, the life of a society in the very earliest phase of evolution—one and the other exhibit diametrically conflicting properties. Manifestly, then, we must reserve for the dialectical method a very large place in natural science and in sociology. Since investigators have begun to do this, these sciences have advanced with rapid strides.”¹

Plekhanov admits the presence of a diversity of opposite aspects or properties and of their mutual interaction in objects and processes. He knows that it is impossible to understand their mutual connection, this combination of opposites, on the basis of *formal* logic; it requires the application of *dialectical* logic. But here he remains, for he does not understand that “the combination of opposites” in processes is not only a unity but also a *conflict* of opposites, that the conflict of indissolubly connected “mutually penetrating” opposites determines the movement, is the basic law of development.

Plekhanov not only failed to recognize the problem of development by means of contradiction as the problem of development by means of division of unity but gave very little attention to the problem of contradiction itself.

He spoke of dialectic only in very general terms as of a theory of eternal development by means of emergence and annihilation. Lenin regarded the theory of the unity and conflict of opposites as the most important aspect of dialectic, but Plekhanov was more concerned with the transitoriness of forms. Thus in expounding Hegel, he said:

“The basis, the chief distinguishing feature of dialectic is indicated by Hegel as an ‘eternal change of forms, an eternal rejection of each form in turn, which is first

¹ Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, p. 120.

brought into existence by a particular content or tendency and subsequently supplanted by another in consequence of the further development of that same content."

Indisputably, the dialectic of content and form comprises one of the essential elements of dialectic. But to indicate this alone is not enough. It is necessary to explain why a given content leads to the necessity of replacing a given form with another determined form. And this is only to be explained by the contradiction of form and content, by their conflict, which is only one of the concrete ways of showing the basic law of dialectic—the law of unity and conflict of opposites. That is what Plekhanov did not understand. Plekhanov understands the law of contradiction only as the statement of the transition of a form into its own individual opposite.

Ignorance of this law led him to declare that one should study, on a basis of formal logic, the moments of comparative stability in any given process.

In the foreword to the second edition of *Ludwig Feuerbach*, Plekhanov directly states that the movement of matter is the basis of all natural phenomena, and that movement is a contradiction. But he illustrates this contradiction only by the example of a mechanical movement, the shifting of a point.

It is true that even a simple movement, the mechanical shifting of a point in space, is contradictory. A moving point is simultaneously found and not found in a given spot. Here already we have the unity of opposites, but in its simplest and most primitive form. Mechanical movement originating in consequence of an impulse or impact, i.e. in consequence of external causes, is derived from some other higher form of movement and is therefore quite inadequate as an illustration of movement in general, as for instance—physical, chemical, biological and social movement. The mechanical is contained in each one of these in a certain degree, but the higher and more complex the form of the movement of matter, the smaller is the rôle that

the mechanical plays. So it is impossible to reduce the contradictions of all these forms of movement to that of mechanical movement.

To stop short with this type of contradiction, as Plekhanov does, is to limit the significance of the law of opposites and render it incapable of explaining "self-movement" since it does not disclose the basic contradictions in the higher types.

Nay, more, he speaks out directly against the understanding of movement by way of division of unity. In his work *On the Development of the Monist View of History*, he wrote: "Whoever wished to penetrate into the essence of the dialectical process and began by expounding the doctrine of the internal opposition found within each successive phenomenon in the course of any evolutionary series, would be approaching the task from the wrong end."

To understand a process, to disclose the source of its self-movement, it is not enough to establish the diversity of the contradictions, the conflict of the many opposing aspects—it is necessary to disclose in this diversity the basic fundamental contradictions which define the movement of the process.

In opposition to the metaphysics of bourgeois ideology, which at the best limited itself to a statement of the mutual action of social "factors," Marx, Engels and Lenin demanded the disclosure of the basic contradiction of every social structure, which consists in the contradiction between those productive forces and the productive relations which are found together in that particular social structure.

This basic contradiction determines all the other contradictions of the given social form and the course of the latter's development. That is the reason why the classical exponents of Marxism regarded the whole mass of contradictions found in social development from the standpoint of this basic contradiction.

Bourgeois political economy, before and after Marx, took its stand on the eternity of bourgeois relations and could not disclose the actual contradictions of capitalism, which

are the law of its emergence, development and decay. Even the foremost intellects of bourgeois economic science—Adam Smith and Ricardo, who taught that value is the substantiated human labour in the article of sale and that the amount of value is determined by the amount of working expenses, that profit and ground rent are the unpaid work of the labourer—even they could not disclose the basic laws of the development of the social formation they were considering, because they had not marked its contradictions. These forerunners of classical bourgeois political economy and their successors also quite failed to penetrate deeper than the surface of the phenomena of distorted capitalist practice. Their “methodology” amounted to this—they sought to turn one of the phenomena of capitalist economy, torn from its connection with the rest, into a principle which could characterize the whole of capitalism. Thus some of them found “the law of supply and demand” to be this principle, others claimed to find it in “the costs of production,” a third group in “the cost to the consumer,” etc. And so they were unable to give any general picture of the development of capitalism or to disclose its governing laws. Marx opposed the metaphysics of bourgeois political economy with his dialectic of capitalist actuality itself; he wrote: “Only by setting in place of opposing dogmas, opposing facts and the real contradictions which make up their concealed basis, is it possible to convert political economy into a positive science.”

Marx disclosed the basic contradictions of the bourgeois means of production and in this way explained the law of its development. He showed that the contradiction between capitalist productive forces and the relations of production determines the development of capitalism.

This contradiction, which emerges in the form of the contradiction between the social character of production and the private means of appropriation, “is also that basic contradiction which includes in itself all those contradictions which surround modern society and are specially evident in heavy industry” (Engels).

This basic contradiction finds its expression and development in a number of other contradictions of capitalism. We will mention some of them.

1. The contradiction between the effective organization of production in each separate factory and the anarchy in the general course of social production.

2. The perfection of machines and the widening of production as the compulsory law for each capitalist, on one side; the growth of a reserve army of industry, and periodically repeating crises, on the other side. Here the means of production rebels against the capitalist relations of production.

3. “For capitalism as a whole there is the peculiarity of the difference between property in capital and the application of capital to production, that is to say between finance capital and industrial or productive capital; the difference between the *rentier* who lives only by income from money capital and the *entrepreneur* together with all those people who take an immediate part in the utilization of their capital” (Lenin).

This last difference in which the social character of production distorted by capitalist relations finds its expression is clearly displayed in the joint-stock companies, in which for the mass of shareholders there remain only the functions of the *rentier* and the formal right of property in the undertaking, whereas the actual allocating of the accumulated profits, the direction of production and the income from the undertaking remain in the hands of a small group of “financial supermen” (Lenin).

Analysing the basic contradictions of capitalism, Marx showed that they lead inevitably to the necessity of revolution and to proletarian dictatorship.

Lenin traced the transformation of capitalism into the last stage of its development—into imperialism, which in a new form, in the form of monopoly, develops the basic contradictions of the capitalist system, leading them to the

final crises of capitalism. By proceeding from analysis of the basic contradictions of monopoly capitalism and the whole sum of contradictions that grow up on their basis, by disclosing the inequality of the development of imperialism in different countries, Lenin showed scientifically the possibility of breaking the imperialist chain at its weakest link, the possibility of a victory of revolution, of a victory of socialism, in a single country.

Lenin and Stalin in their works have shown the basic, leading contradiction of the socialist transitional economy; it is the struggle of socialism with the remnants of capitalism.

The basic contradiction of our transitional economy was formulated by Lenin as follows:

“The economy of Russia in the epoch of proletarian dictatorship presents itself as the conflict between the first forms of the communistic unified large-scale labour-State and small-scale commodity production accompanied by the capitalism that is being preserved along with it and is always being reborn on its basis.”

This concentrated Leninist formula contains the characteristic of the following three aspects of the contradiction of transitional economy.

1. *The contradiction of large-scale socialist industry with the market-capitalist tendencies of small-scale commodity economy.*

This contradiction was and is being resolved, not by the brutal pressure of the proletariat on the peasantry, as our enemies depict it, but in a form of union of the proletariat with the peasantry under the guidance of the proletariat, which union has as its task the abolition of classes and is directed both against the capitalist tendencies of the peasantry itself, and against those capitalist agents who ceaselessly try to play on those tendencies in order to break up this union from within.

This union is made actual firstly by means of the identification of the interests of the small producer with the interests of socialism, with the aims of developing socialist industry,

and secondly by means of the socialist reconstruction of peasant economy in the form of all-round collectivization, which signifies the liquidation of that base for the continual rebirth of capitalism to which Lenin alluded.

2. *The antagonism between the interests of the proletariat, the owners of socialistic industry, and the capitalistic elements—elements which have been in part already expropriated since the October Revolution and put to rout in the civil war, but are not yet finally liquidated, and in part are being born anew on the basis of N.E.P.¹ on the basis of individualist, small-scale, peasant economy.*

This contradiction was resolved by the proletariat on the lines of the general policy of the party which was the industrialization of the country and the socialist recasting of peasant economy; different methods were required at different stages of the revolution—ranging from the policy of curtailing and expelling the capitalist elements to the liquidation of the kulaks as a class and the establishment of all-round collectivization.

The basic contradictions of the transitional period, which have been indicated by Lenin, find their expression in a number of its other contradictions. Such for example is the contradiction between our advanced socialist relations and the backward technique which is the heritage of Russian capitalism; this contradiction will be resolved by a vigorous development of socialist industry.

Another such contradiction is the contradiction between the socialist organization of production and petty bourgeois and bourgeois habits and traditions relating to production and work, which once again are the workers' heritage from the past; this contradiction will be resolved by the mass recasting of the people under the leadership of the Party, by the fostering of socialist discipline, by the developing of new socialist forms of work.

¹ *N.E.P.* The New Economic Policy was adopted under the leadership of Lenin at the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party in 1921. It allowed considerable scope for private trading but retained a State monopoly of foreign trade, transport, heavy industry and much light industry. It allowed the rapid growth of capitalist elements in the countryside. It was in Lenin's own words, “*Capitalism plus socialism.*”

3. *We will point finally to the contradiction between the still limited output of socialist industry and agriculture and the growing demands of the workers.*

This contradiction is being resolved by the increasing productivity of labour in industry and agriculture, by the vigorous tempo of the industrialization of the land, by the development of light industry, by the mobilization of the internal resources of heavy industry for production of widely demanded goods, by the struggle for the organized economic strengthening of the collective farms and finally by the developing of collective farm trade.

In disclosing the above-mentioned basic contradiction of the transitional economy of the U.S.S.R., Lenin and Stalin showed that the proletariat of the Soviet Union under the leadership of the Communist Party, by having set up its dictatorship, by possessing large-scale industry, transport and colossal resources of natural wealth, by introducing a monopoly of external trade, by establishing a union with the middle peasantry, possesses everything necessary for the resolution of this contradiction by its own internal powers. It possesses everything necessary to industrialize the country, to lead the peasant economy into socialist forms of agriculture and in this way to abolish classes. Lenin and Stalin have shown the full possibility of a victory for socialism in our country.

Stalin wrote:

“What is meant by the possibility of the victory of socialism in one country? It is the possibility of resolving the contradictions between the proletariat and the peasantry by the internal forces of our country, the possibility of the proletariat's gaining power and making use of that power for the construction of a full socialist society in our country, accompanied by the sympathy and support of the proletarians of other countries, but without a preliminary victory of the proletarian revolution in those other countries.”

This basic contradiction will be finally resolved in the U.S.S.R. at the end of the second Five Year Plan, which has as its basic problem the full liquidation of capitalist elements and classes generally, the abolition of all those causes that create class distinctions—the construction of a classless society.

After the abolition of classes, internal contradictions, in spite of the opinion of opportunists, will still be the source of the “self-movement” of society.

Although it is not our purpose here to dwell on what the basic contradiction of communist society is going to be, yet we can say with assurance, that in the first phase of communism—socialism—the determining form of this contradiction will be the contradiction between the socialist character of production (based on society's appropriation of the means of production) and the distribution of the “means of existence and enjoyment” (with the exclusion of necessary social funds) according to work done. This contradiction determines and will determine the whole diversity of the aspects of social development. It will be resolved by the growth of the productivity of labour and on that basis by such a refashioning of our people as will make possible the realization of the principle: “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”

And so to understand the movement of any process it is necessary to disclose, amidst the diversity of its contradictions and opposite tendencies, the basic contradiction which determines the development of the process as a whole; it is necessary to disclose the source of its “self-movement.”

The internal contradictions of every process are qualitatively distinct from those of any other process. The basic contradiction of capitalism—the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which can be solved only by socialist revolution, is one matter; the basic contradiction of the transitional economy, which will be solved by the industrialization of the country, by collectivization and Soviet farm construction, is another.

Trotsky did not understand the essential character and specific nature of the development of the basic contradiction of capitalism in the imperialist epoch, he did not understand the law of uneven development. This is the first reason for his denial of the possibility of a victory for socialism in one country. According to Trotsky the contradiction between the proletariat and peasantry in the U.S.S.R. is the same sort of contradiction as the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in a capitalist economy and, in his opinion, is to be resolved in the same way as the second—by international revolution. Trotsky also did not see the specific difference, that the peasants are small-scale commodity-producers who work with their own means of production and not bourgeois who exploit the work of other people (though it is true that from the midst of the peasants capitalism is being born every minute), that as a workman the peasant is the ally of the proletariat and that under a proletarian dictatorship conditions are created that will bring over the peasantry to socialist forms of agriculture. This is the second reason for his denial of the possibility of a victory for socialism in one country. Practice has gloriously refuted Trotsky and has shown that a contradiction which is qualitatively different must be differently resolved. The contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the conditions of capitalism is to be resolved by revolution, by a proletarian seizure of state-power, but the contradiction between the proletariat and the peasantry in the conditions of the U.S.S.R. is to be resolved by industrialization of the country and by the collectivization of the agricultural economy, which leads to the liquidation of classes.

Practice has gloriously confirmed the theory of the possibility of a victory for socialism in one country.

The opportunists of the right do not remark the specific character of the contradictions between the proletariat and the peasantry, and between the proletariat and the capitalist elements of a country—these two contradictions

are held by them to be of the same type, on this idea rests their theory of the peaceful transition of the kulak into socialism.

The lessons we get from Trotskyism and right opportunism teach us the necessity of disclosing the specific quality of the internal contradictions of any process. And for this a knowledge of every aspect of the contradiction is necessary. Marx wrote in *The Holy Family*, "Proletariat and riches are contradictions; as such they form a united whole. Both of them are brought forth by the world of private property. The question is, what definite position does each of these two opposites occupy in the contradiction." It is not enough to say they are the two aspects of a united whole. To understand the basic contradictions of capitalism we must get to know the specific properties of the proletariat and bourgeoisie, their relations with each other, their concrete mutual independence, and the mutual conditioning factors of both classes. What the Marx-Leninist dialectic requires for the study of any process is this: the exhaustive disclosure of all aspects of the contradiction with their concrete relations, that is to say, the "definite position which each of the two opposites occupies in the contradiction."