

CHAPTER III

MUTUAL PENETRATION OF
OPPOSITES

NOT ONLY does every unity contain within itself polar opposites but these internal opposites are mutually connected with each other; one aspect of a contradiction cannot exist without the other. In capitalist society the bourgeoisie is connected with the proletariat, the proletariat with the bourgeoisie; neither of these two classes can develop without the other, because the bourgeoisie cannot exist without exploiting the labour of others and the hired proletariat cannot exist without selling its labour power to a capitalist, seeing that itself it does not possess the means of production.

This mutual connectedness and mutual conditioning of contradictory aspects of actuality has also been stressed by the Party in its struggle on two fronts on the question of the character of N.E.P.

“When a policy like that of the N.E.P. is adopted, both aspects must be preserved: the first aspect, which is directed against the régime of militant communism and has as its aim the securing of what is known as the free market, and the second aspect, which is directed against complete freedom of market and has as its aim the securing of a regulating rôle by the state over the market. Abolish one of these aspects and you will no longer have the N.E.P.” (Stalin).

We see the same indissoluble connection of contradictory aspects in all the processes of objective actuality. There

is no mechanical action without its counteraction. The chemical dissolution of atoms is indissolubly connected with their union. Electrical energy declares itself in the form of opposite electricities—positive and negative.

“The existence of two mutually contradictory aspects, their conflict and their flowing together into a new category,” wrote Marx, “comprises the essence of the dialectical movement. If you limit yourself to the task of warding off the bad aspect (for the preservation of the ‘good’ aspect corresponding to it, as Proudhon demanded) then by the separation of these aspects you put an end to the whole dialectical process.”

Opposites are not only found in indissoluble, inalienable connection, but they cross over and mutually penetrate each other.

Thus process of production in a capitalist factory is simultaneously an aggregation of capitalist productive relations (for example the relations between the capitalist and the worker), and an aggregation of productive forces (the labour of the workers and the means of production). Development from manufacture¹ to machine production is not only a change of productive forces, but a development and spreading of new productive relations. The union of the labour force of the workers and the means of production is simultaneously a connection of productive forces and a connection of people in the process of production, which together make up the relation. The division of labour in manufacture is a relation in production and emerges also as a productive force.

On the basis of this mutual penetration of capitalist productive forces, and capitalist relations in production, the process of ever intensifying contradiction between proletariat and bourgeoisie is also developed.

¹ *Manufacture*, strictly speaking, means “by hand” (Latin, *manus*) not by machine. It refers therefore to the period before machine-facture and steam power.

The mutual penetration of opposites, the transition of one opposite into another, belongs to all processes. But to uncover and reveal this mutual penetration, a careful, concrete analysis of the process is required.

The interests of the proletariat and the working peasantry in the U.S.S.R., classes opposed to each other both on account of their historic past and their relations to the means of production, are nowadays beginning to coincide. With regard to fundamental questions of socialist construction, the peasant, as worker, appears as the ally of the proletariat. The peasant is interested in the strengthening of the proletarian dictatorship, because it guards him from having to return the land to the landlords and delivers him from exploitation by the kulak.¹ The peasant is interested in the socialist development of agricultural economy because this is the best method of raising agricultural economy to a higher level. The peasant is interested in the industrialization of the country because this creates a material basis for raising the level of agricultural economy and guarantees the defence of the country from the encroachment of capitalists and landlords. Here we have the coincidence of the interests of the proletariat and the peasantry. Not until conditions were favourable for the rapid expansion of socialist industry on the one hand and for a mass movement of the peasants towards collectivization on the other, was it possible to unite the private-property interests of the peasants with the general interests of socialism.

The first form of this combination was the N.E.P., which at the end of the civil war made possible the improvement of individualistic peasant economy and its co-operation on the basis of what is called the free market, under state control. In this way the raw material and provisions for

¹ *Kulak, lit. fist.* The tight-fisted, well-to-do peasant. "He may be a good manager, a man of enterprise and initiative, but as long as he exercises his talents for his own benefit, for the benefit of individualism, he is a great danger, a great enemy and must be wiped out" (*Hindus, Humanity Uprooted*).

socialist industry were guaranteed. The combination of peasant economy and large-scale industry became ever closer as socialist relations in industry and trade, the industrialization of the country, the development of machine-tractor stations and of the system of collective contracts with the state kept growing and were confirmed. The result of this policy is that now, on the basis of direct collectivization of individual peasant holdings, N.E.P. has become a form of combination of the private-property interests of the peasantry with the interests of socialism, and this leads to the growth and strengthening of socialist relations. The world-historical strategic significance of N.E.P. is determined by this fact, that the Party set up this policy on the basis of a profound analysis of the course and development of the contradictions of the transitional economy and the indissoluble connection of the opposite tendencies of their mutual penetration.

We have emerged into the period of socialism and we are experiencing the last stage of N.E.P.—*that is a contradiction!* We are proceeding to a final liquidation of classes and we are strengthening the financial system and credit organizations; we have adopted cost-accounting, we keep the purchasing power of the rouble stable and along with the organized economic strengthening of the collective farms we encourage the development of collective farm trading. But we do this because the strengthening of the financial system and the state banks is at the same time helping us to take stock of our economic position, to plan more exactly and to introduce disciplined business control. The cost-accounting system, the introduction of socialist planning into the workshop, the brigade, and the collective farm. The development of collective farm trading strengthens the bond between the proletariat and the collective-farm peasants. An example of the analysis of the mutual penetration of opposites is given by Stalin in his solution of the problem of the relation of national and international culture under socialism.

“The encouragement of cultures that are national in form and socialistic in content,” said Stalin, in his report to the Sixteenth Assembly, “under conditions of proletarian dictatorship in one country, with the ultimate aim of welding them into one general socialist culture (one both in form and content), with one general language, for the day when the proletariat shall have conquered and socialism have spread all over the world—in this conception we find the truly dialectical character of the Leninist approach to this question of national culture.

“It may be objected that such a way of stating the question is ‘contradictory.’ But do we not meet with similar contradictions in the question of the State? We are for the withering away of the State. And yet we also believe in the proletarian dictatorship, which represents the strongest and mightiest form of State power that has existed up to now. To keep on developing State power in order to prepare the conditions for the withering away of State power—that is the Marxist formula. It is ‘contradictory’? Yes, ‘contradictory.’ But the contradiction is vital, and wholly reflects Marxian dialectic.

“Or for example, the Leninist statement on the right of the constituted nations of the U.S.S.R. to self-determination, even up to the point of cutting adrift from the Soviet Union. Lenin sometimes used to put his thesis on national self-determination in the form of this simple statement, ‘disunity for unity.’ Just think—disunity for unity! It smacks of paradox. All the same this contradictory formula reflects that vital truth of Marxian dialectic which enables the Bolsheviks to overcome the most formidable obstacles that beset this national question.

“The same thing must be said about the question of national culture; there is an efflorescence of national cultures (and languages) in the period of proletarian dictatorship in one country but the very purpose of this is to prepare the conditions for the extinction of these separate cultures and the welding of them into one

common socialist culture (and one common language) when socialism shall be victorious over the whole world.

“Whoever has not understood this feature of the contradictions belonging to our transitional time, whoever has not understood this dialectic of historical processes, that person is dead to Marxism.”

In the transitional period, when the masses of builders of socialism have not yet “divested themselves of the skin of the old capitalist Adam,” when individualist habits and survivals are not yet outlived even in the ranks of the working class (to say nothing of the peasantry and old intelligentsia), we have to deal with many cases of the divergence of personal and social interests. But the Communist Party does not brush aside this actual contradiction and does not idealize actuality. It proceeds from the principle that the development of socialist relations for the first time in history makes widely possible such a “mutual penetration” of personal and social interests as will lead, not to the crushing of personality, but to its real and full development along the same line as the interests of all society. This “mutual penetration” is manifested in the form of piece-work, the insistence of differential wages according to the quality and quantity of the work done, the bonus system, diplomas and other awards for exceptionally good work and other forms of encouragement designed to enlist all the powers of the individual in the service of society.

“Mutual penetration” of opposites is also characteristic of the processes of our knowledge.

One of the basic contradictions of human knowledge is, as we have already seen, the contradiction of relative and absolute truths.

We have the same mutual penetration in the relationship of the particular and the general which are reflected in our ideas. The particular does not exist except in relation to the general. The general exists only in the particulars. Every generalization only approximately grasps all the particular

objects. Every particular thing partly enters into the general.

The universal laws of development, reflected in the categories of materialistic dialectic, can be understood only on the basis of the mutual penetration of opposites.

“Dialectic shows,” writes Engels, “that to hold that basis and consequence, cause and action, identity and difference, being and essence, are unalterable opposites, will not bear criticism. Analysis shows the presence of one pole in latent form within the other, that at the determined point one pole goes over into the other and that all logic is developed only from the moving of these two opposites in one another’s direction.”

Lenin used to call this “mutual penetration” of opposites—the identity of opposites. To disclose the mutual penetration, the identity of opposites in any process is the central problem of our theory of knowledge, of materialistic dialectic.

Aptly enough, Engels, in defining the three basic laws of dialectic, formulated the law of movement through contradictions as “the law of the mutual penetration of opposites.”

Lenin defined dialectic as “the teaching of how contradictions may be and are identical; under what conditions they are identical; how they turn into each other and so become identical; why the mind of man must not accept these opposites as dead or frozen but as living, conditional, mobile, the one always in process of turning into the other.”

To understand how opposites become identical is only possible by means of a careful, concrete and profound analysis of the process, by a study of the movement of all its basic aspects at its different stages, of all the conditions and possibilities of their transitions.

The mutual penetration of opposites, being the expression of the basic scientific laws underlying the process, becomes possible and is realized only in some particular complex of conditions.

The wage labourer is a living identity of opposites since he is the basic productive force of capitalism and all material commodities and at the same time is divorced from the means of production, possesses nothing except his hands, and is exploited by another class. Such a mutual penetration of opposites becomes possible only under the conditions of the capitalist system of production.

The development of a culture, national in form, and international in content, the strengthening of the state power for the creation of the conditions leading to its decline, become possible and necessary only under the proletarian dictatorship. The development of cost accounting in order to strengthen the financial system for the development of socialist planning is necessary in the period when it is still impossible to replace money in any way, and is possible only until the conditions for doing away with money shall have been created. The raising of the productivity of labour by enlisting the personal interest of the worker, by encouraging the more highly qualified workers, by the preferential treatment of shock-brigaders, is possible only in the conditions of proletarian dictatorship and because increase in the productivity of labour is the decisive condition for constructing a complete socialist society and for the transition to a communist society with its principle of distribution according to needs.

The understanding of this aspect of the law of the unity and conflict of opposites has made possible a correct analysis of the economic situation, of the mutual relations of classes and parties and consequently has determined the policy of our Party. Lenin wrote:

“We have all been learning a little Marxism; we have been learning how and when it is possible to unite opposites. Even more important is the fact that the revolution has compelled us to be continually uniting opposites in practice. But let us remember that these opposites may be united so as to obtain either mere discords or a symphony.”

Such a dialectical combination of opposing policies which appeared absolutely incompatible to the Mensheviks was the policy of our Party in relation to the Liberals in the period of the *Zemstvo* campaign¹ "to keep distinct in order to strike together." On the basis of such a combination was built the policy of the party in relation to the peasantry at different stages of the revolution, the combining of the interests of the proletariat and of the poorer peasants to bring about the socialist revolution, the policy of union with the well-to-do peasantry after the eighth assembly of the Party.

A clear model of the combination of opposites in the policy of the Party is found in the "Six Conditions"² of Stalin which introduced business methods and payment by results into Soviet industry and which, while giving every kind of support to the old intelligentsia, took steps to create, in the shortest period possible, numerous cadres of working-class technical experts. This "combination of opposites" in the policy of our Party is directed towards social development in a determined direction and was always worked out in practice on the basis of an accurate and concrete study of objective contradictions. That is why this combination always resulted in victory for the party line. That is why we have got from it a "symphony," not mere discords.

A combination of opposites that does not issue from a faithful reckoning with objective conditions and facts is an eclectic combination and cannot lead to the victory of the determined trend of development, but instead to its defeat.

¹ *Zemstvo campaign*. The *zemstvos* or provincial assemblies were created in 1864 and consisted of a number of elected delegates of landowners and peasants. Their powers were restricted in 1890 but in 1905 in response to public opinion they regained some of their independent initiative. The question then was to what extent revolutionary socialists should participate in these bodies.

² "The Six Conditions" of Stalin, were laid down in his speech to the leaders of industry in June 1931. Stalin asserted that a new situation had been created by the development of industry and that this required new methods of working. He enumerated six of these including rationalization, payment by results, personal responsibility for the job, technical education, encouragement of the intelligentsia and business accounting.

Thus the Mensheviks constructed a whole policy of struggle for a bourgeois democratic revolution on the basis of an eclectic combination of the interests of the proletariat with those of the liberal bourgeoisie, which combination ignored the irreconcilability of those interests, ignored the concrete conditions of the development of Russia, ignored the peasantry as the basic ally of the proletariat in this revolution, and handed the hegemony in the revolution to the liberal bourgeoisie, to whose interests it subordinated those of the proletariat. Such a combination led, as we said, to discord, to the defeat of the bourgeois democratic revolution.

The right opportunists in the U.S.S.R. held it necessary to combine the interests of the proletariat with those of the peasantry in such a way as neither to harm the kulak by curtailing his tendencies to exploit—rather to enable him to develop them—nor to prepare or carry out the policy of liquidating the kulak as a class. They held it was necessary to combine for many decades the small scale individualist peasant economy with large scale socialistic production. This combination is eclectic and impossible, for it fails to realize the impracticability of continuing a long drawn-out development of a double system—large scale socialist industry on the one hand, and on the other, decaying peasant economy, that economy which every hour and every minute gives birth again to capitalism. This combination ignored the irreconcilability of the interests of the proletariat and the capitalist elements. Such a combination would inevitably lead not to a victory for socialism but to a bourgeois restoration. Gradualist socialists seek theoretically to base their betrayal of the interests of the working class and their furious war against communism on an eclectic combination of the irreconcilable class-antagonists—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—as given in the doctrine of the "evolution of capitalism into socialism."

The group of Menshevik idealists, in spite of its repeated declarations on the unity of opposites as their mutual penetration, has in its analysis of concrete problems

distorted both the proposition itself and the facts under investigation. The mutual penetration of opposites has in essence been reduced by them to the more limited notion that opposites presuppose each other. It is this abstract approach, this approach "in general" without concrete analysis, that has prevented the Deborin group from rightly understanding the dialectical unity of the historic and the logical in knowledge, the unity of theory and practice in revolutionary struggle and the actual relationships between the proletariat and peasantry in revolution.

The study of mutual penetration, of the identity of opposites, demands a concrete enquiry into the contradictory aspects of a process in its movement and development, the conditioning and mobility of all its facets, their conversion into each other.

But those mechanists who hold themselves to be Marxists do not understand movement by means of contradictions. The mechanistic view has been very clearly and directly expressed by Bukharin in his *Theory of Historic Materialism*.

"In the world there exist differently acting forces directed one against the other. Only in exceptional cases do they balance each other. Then we have a state of rest, i.e. their actual conflict remains hidden. But it is sufficient to change one of these forces, and immediately the internal contradictions will be manifest, there will ensue a breakdown of equilibrium, and if a new equilibrium is established, it is established on a new basis, i.e. with another combination of forces, etc. What follows from this? It follows that 'conflict of opposites,' i.e. the antagonism of differently directed forces, does indeed condition movement."

According to Bukharin, there exist forces independent of each other and they act on each other. It is this external collision of differently directed forces that conditions movement. While Lenin requires to know in the first place the internal contradictions of a process, to find the source of

self-movement, Bukharin requires the determination of external forces that collide with each other. Lenin speaks of the division of the unity, requires the disclosure of the internal identity of opposites, the establishment of the concrete character of the connections of opposing aspects and their transitions. Bukharin requires the mere finding of independent forces. He understands the law of the unity of opposites mechanically, because he proceeds from the mechanics of a simple collision of forces independent of each other, as the general notional "model" which is suitable to explain every phenomenon. Such a reduction of an internal process to a conflict of independent forces inevitably leads to the seeking of the cause of change outside the process, in the action of its environment.

From the mechanistic understanding of the unity of opposites proceeds the theory of organized capitalism, which holds, as fundamental for the epoch of imperialism, not the internal contradictions of each country, but their external contradictions on the world arena.

On the mechanistic understanding of contradictions is constructed the Trotskyist theory that denies the possibility of a socialist victory in one country. Trotsky recognizes, as basic and decisive in this question, not the internal contradictions of our Soviet economy (which are being resolved within the country), but the external contradictions, the contradictions between the Soviet Union and capitalist countries. Trotsky holds that it is these last that determine the development of soviet economy and so only a resolution of these contradictions can lead to a complete victory of socialism in our country.

Bukharin, like all mechanists, identifies contradiction with antagonism. That is wrong. Those contradictions (carefully distinguished by Marx and Engels in their analysis of the complex forms of development of class society) are antagonistic, in which the struggle of indissolubly connected opposites proceeds in the form of their external collisions, which are directed on the part of the dominant opposite so as to preserve the subordination of

its opposite and of the type of contradiction itself; and on the part of the subordinated opposite—to the destruction of the dominant opposite and of the contradiction itself as well.

The contradiction of any process is resolved, not by some external force, as think the mechanists, but by the development of the contradiction itself. This is true also in regard to antagonistic contradictions. But in the course of development of an antagonistic contradiction at its different stages, only the *premises* for its resolution are prepared and ripen. The contradiction itself at every new stage becomes ever more intensified. An antagonistic contradiction does not pass beyond the stages of its partial resolution.

Thus the periodic crises of capitalism are a violent form in which the contradictions of a given cycle of capitalist reproduction find their resolution; but in relation to the contradictions of the capitalist means of production as a whole, these crises emerge only as landmarks of the further intensification of these contradictions and of the ripening of the forces making for the violent overthrow of capitalism.

Antagonistic contradictions are resolved by the kind of leap in which the internal opposites emerge as relatively independent opposites, external to each other, by a leap that leads to the abolition of the formerly dominant opposite and to the establishment of a new contradiction. In this contradiction the subordinated opposite of the previous contradiction now becomes the dominant opposite, preserving a number of its peculiarities and determining by itself the form of the new contradiction, especially at the first stages of its development.

But in contradictions that do not have an antagonistic character, the development of the contradiction signifies not only the growth of the forces making for its final resolution, but each new step in the development of the contradiction is at the same time also its partial resolution.

Not all contradictions are antagonistic. Thus the relationships of the proletariat and the peasantry are not of an

antagonistic character—in both classes we find a number of common interests. In a class society the contradictions of the basic classes are antagonistic and are resolved in antagonistic form. In developed socialist society there will be no class struggle, no class antagonism. “It is only in an order of things,” says Marx, “in which there will be no more classes and class antagonism, that social evolutions will cease to be political revolutions.”¹

But Bukharin, because he identifies contradiction with antagonism, holds that in general there will be in this case no contradictions at all.

This is what Lenin wrote in answer to that assertion: “Quite wrong. Antagonism and contradiction are by no means the same. Under socialism the first will vanish, the second will remain.”

If in developed socialism there were *no* contradictions—contradictions between productive forces and relations in production, between production and demand, no contradictions in the development of technique, etc.—then the development of socialism would be impossible, then instead of movement we should have stagnation. Only in virtue of the internal contradictions of the socialist order can there be development from one phase to another and higher phase.

But each step in the development of socialism will denote not only a ripening of the *forces* making for a developed communist society, but also an *immediate* partial resolution of the contradictions of socialism. Just in the same way, each new stage in the transitional period denotes not only a growth of the *forces* making for socialism (which can enter into being once the leap to a new order is made), but also an *immediate* construction of socialism, a partial resolution of the most basic contradiction of the transitional period.

The identification of contradiction with antagonism leads on the one hand to the Trotskyist assertion that the contradictions between the proletariat and the peasantry

¹ Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*.

are of the same character as those between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, i.e. are relations of class antagonism. On the other hand, it leads to right-opportunist conclusions. The right-opportunists maintain that the relations of these classes are not antagonistic and are, therefore, not even contradictory.