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ON AN ANSWER THAT DID NOT ANSWER

By Marc Loris

Comrade Warde's article In Defense of Materialist Dialectic bears the sub-title: "An answer to Comrade Loris." However, the word "answer" is not properly used here, for Warde does not answer the questions I asked him.

Warde promptly corrected his ambiguous formula on the "semi-religious" character of the doctrine of Marx. Good! We can put this point aside. But this was but one of the points I raised. Indeed, my Brief Remarks (later on referred to as BR) were primarily devoted to showing the great difficulties created by Warde's examples in his presentation of dialectic. I indicated that these difficulties have their roots in what I called his ontological approach, and that they do not exist in my own, which we may, for the time being, designate by the term of epistemological.

Warde could have used a very simple way of replying to me: it was to answer my questions about his examples, to show that they present no difficulties and, therefore, that there is no need for an interpretation different from his own.

Warde has not chosen this simple and natural way. He has not answered my questions. He simply dismissed them by saying that I "single out a few isolated examples."

Let us suppose for a moment that this affirmation of his is true. This does not in any way justify Warde's silence on this point. With his conception of the universal character of contradiction, Warde's incapacity to explain even one single example would endanger his whole construction.

But Warde's affirmation that I "single out a few isolated examples" is not correct. I cited almost all the examples given by Warde in the main chapter of his course, the one on contradiction. And it would have been just as easy to cite the rest. Moreover, what does Warde mean by "isolated" examples? Does he mean that by taking his examples out of their context I distorted their meaning? But if that was the case, why didn't he fulfill the very simple task of explaining the real meaning of his examples to us?

Warde proclaims himself the "orthodox" defender of Marxism. But this title entails certain responsibilities. Warde has presented not "a few isolated", but many interconnected examples. In our ranks quite a few comrades make as little sense of these examples as I do, or have grave doubts about them. Outside of our ranks, many adversaries are only too ready to use them to discredit Marxism. I called upon Warde to explain himself concerning these examples, either to reject them as he did his adjective "semi-religious" (and everyone of us is entitled to quite a few mistakes), or to clarify them so well that every party member should be able to understand them, be prepared to expound them and be armed to defend them against attacks. Warde has dodged this responsibility and this obligation toward the party.

Warde asks me why, instead of dealing with his examples, I did not confront his general conception of contradiction. As if his conception could remain valid independently of the correctness of the examples in which it is expressed! It was perfectly clear to me when I wrote my BR that we have to come to a general discussion of the nature of contradiction. If I took to task only Warde's examples, it is because I wanted to see before the general discussion, and in order to facilitate it, what Warde was really prepared to defend: if he would cling to his examples and try to justify them, or if he would abandon them. Unfortunately, something happened which I had not foreseen: he did neither one nor the other, he simply kept silent about these examples.

While avoiding answering the questions I asked him, Warde shifted the budding discussion toward a series of problems, some of great theoretical importance, some of much less importance, but all presented in such a way as to make their discussion of very little profit. They are here solely to conceal a vacuum, his lack of replies to the questions I asked. I must call them smokescreens, -- not the problems themselves, some of which are very important, but the problems as introduced and presented by Warde in his "answer" to me. I shall deal now with some of these smokescreens.

Smokescreen No. 1: formal logic

In BR I mentioned "formal logic, which is the science of consistency in passing from a group of statements to another without taking direct support into reality". Although that phrase had an incidental character, I was precise enough to speak of no direct support, which does not exclude any indirect support and even, in a way, implies it.

Warde has skipped over the word "direct", and he turns all possible weapons against a position he attributes to me as a result of hasty reading. What I wanted to say is very clear and quite familiar and I never suspected that Warde would be capable of misunderstanding it. The laws of formal logic, of consistency, enable us to pass from a group of statements to another without further reference to reality. It is the very common distinction between logical deduction and direct observation by experience. That these laws of consistency have originally been abstracted from nature, it is clear to me, for it is the only way to explain that they enable us to deal with nature. But precisely because they have been once abstracted, when we use them in a process of deduction, we do not refer again to experience, except at the beginning and at the end of the process.

This does not mean in any way an overestimation of the value of formal consistency. All modern research in this field during the last hundred years (symbolic logic) have brought important developments, but within very precise limits. Beyond these there are many logical (epistemological) problems that symbolic logic cannot deal with, and whose existence it has not even yet perceived. On the

limits of symbolic logic I share the position of J. Gerland in the June 1940 Fourth International.

The nature of formal logic may, of course, be the subject of an interesting and important discussion. But in Warde's hands it becomes a smokescreen: he skips over my word "direct", stoutly demolishes a position that is not mine and then expresses a conception which is not incompatible with mine. For Warde writes a little later on: "The content of logic is derived, to be sure, from the procedures and products of thought. But since thought derives its content from material reality, the content of logic is, in the last analysis, derived from the external world." Thus, the content of logic is derived from the external world only "in the last analysis". I said that in the process of formal logical deduction there is no direct support into reality. Warde shows that the relation between logic and reality is not too immediate. Where is the contradiction? Why did Warde have to start that quarrel?

Smokescreen No. 2: abstraction

Warde writes: "Loris tries to restrict the laws of dialectics to epistemology on the ground that they are abstractions." This statement is not correct and Warde could not--and did not--support it by any quotation from me.

I never reproached any of Warde's formulations for being abstractions. I reproached them for being "empty abstractions," "extremely vague abstractions." What Warde has done here may be indicated by the following example. A worker tells his foreman: "Icannot use this machine. It is a bad machine." And the foreman replies: "Ah, ah! You are against machines!" Likewise, for Warde I am against abstractions because I refuse to use empty abstractions.

Warde's correct answer to me should have been to try to show that his abstractions are not empty. Instead, he engages himself in a lengthy homily on the virtues of abstraction, on which we are in agreement. However, the question is not one of abstraction, but of the specific abstractions used by Warde. If our foreman would tell the worker: "But, you know, machines are very useful things," I imagine the worker would answer: "I know the importance of machines as well as you. However, we are speaking not of machines in general, but of this rusty piece of junk."

In face of Warde's singular proceeding, I cannot but ask myself: why did he have to use such a bad argument? Would it be because he was in need of better ones?

Smokescreen No. 3: change

Warde writes, apparently referring to my conception: "Everything changes...except things." (The three dots are Warde's, not an abbreviation of mine.) Having established this as my opinion, Warde

can safely write: "Loris' view leads to the disintegration and destruction of all scientific knowledge." And a little later on, not without astonishment, I learn that I give "no objective reality to change".

Confronted with these affirmations which are so completely alien to my ideas, I can only try to state my conception as simply as I can.

I never denied that things change. I simply denied the existence of a scheme of change which applies to all fields and which can be transposed successively from one field to another. The changes in the physical world are represented and foretold by physical laws. The changes in the biological and the social world are dealt with by biological and social laws. I deny the existence of a general "law" of change (development) which can be applied to all fields, and by law I mean a useful weapon which permits us to foretell change, in the current sense of scientific law, and not a mere metaphor which expresses a subjective state.

To prevent any misunderstanding, I must add that I do not consider the various fields as cut off from each other completely. As I tried to explain in BR, scientific laws in different fields have a tendency to connect one to another, and to form a system. This process is far from being terminated, of course, but with its progress, the relation between the laws in two different fields is the relation between two different parts of one organized whole, not the mere repetition of the same scheme of change transported from one field to another.

Contrary to Warde's affirmation, therefore, I do not deny change in things. I cannot understand very well how Warde has been able to write such a statement. One more argument that reveals itself to be nothing but a smokescreen.

Warde's new example

Warde gives a description of scientific laws -- he takes as an example those of geometry -- tells us how useful they are and how they permit us to deal with reality, and he writes at the end: "The laws of dialectical logic work in the same way as the laws of geometry." But precisely this is what we asked him to demonstrate. Warde merely asserts the analogy between the laws of dialectic, as he understands them, and the laws of geometry, and thinks that the virtues he has discovered in the latter will be by this very affirmation communicated to the former. Unfortunately for Warde, this kind of magic does not work.

The laws of geometry permit us to determine with extreme precision the relative position of sun and earth at any given time. The laws of dialectics, according to Warde, permit him to find a "contradiction" between sun and earth. When asked what he means by that "contradiction," he does not answer the question but nevertheless does not hesitate to proclaim that dialectical laws "work in

the same way" as the laws of geometry.

The reader will judge this method for himself. As for me, I shall now call his attention to a new example introduced by Warde:

"Take the dialectical law that, at a certain critical stage in the development of a process, accumulated quantitative changes produce a new quality. If we apply this formula to a current political problem such as: is China waging an independent struggle for national independence or is it, like Mexico, completely subordinated to an imperialist power? -- this general rule does not give us any immediate answer. But it tells us how to analyze the particular material circumstances of China's struggle; how to appraise the relative weight of the relevant factors; and how to arrive at a correct conclusion."

Let us reread Warde's affirmation: the law tells us "how to analyze...", "how to appraise...", "how to arrive at a correct conclusion...". The law, thus, clearly has a methodological character and it is obvious that, in spite of Warde's incantation, it does not "work in the same way" as the laws of geometry. For the laws of geometry do not tell us how to arrive at a correct conclusion; they give us the correct conclusion: information about figures and bodies, areas and volumes, etc. Thus, Warde's new example disproves his immediately preceding affirmation.

As for me, I am ready to accept Warde's new example, for it has a purely methodological character, and the relation of epistemology to method is the relation of a science to an application of that science.

A strange reproach

Warde writes that, if Engels had followed my example, he "would not have been a materialist dialectician. He would not even have been a consistent disciple of Hegel."

Warde strangely supposes that Engels was a "consistent disciple of Hegel." Moreover, he connects by the word "even" the fact of being a "materialist dialectician" to the fact of being a "consistent disciple of Hegel." Thus, his sentence presents the "materialist dialecticians" as a sub-group included in a more general group, namely the "consistent disciples of Hegel." And as I refuse to be included in the group of "consistent disciples of Hegel," I am ipso facto excluded from the ranks of its sub-group of "materialis dialecticians." A very strange conception and a very strange reproach!

As a matter of fact, Engels was not a "consistent disciple of Hegel," for, as far as I know, he agreed with Marx' statement that: "My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite."

Why suddenly does Warde have to disguise Engels as a "consistent disciple of Hegel?" Against me, Warde calls upon the authority of Hegel who "would have scornfully dismissed any dialectician who separated or divorced thought and being." But every student of Hegel knows that this "scornful" attitude of his against separation of thought and being was of an idealistic character; in fact, it was the very essence of his idealism. Thus, to refute my conception of dialectic, Warde has to lean upon Hegel's idealistic teachings. Very, very strange!

A few words on materialism

A little further, Warde polemizes against "the Kantians, the Humeans, the empirio-criticists, the pragmatists and the logical positivists", among whom he places me, for reasons known to him alone. Warde defines materialism as the "principled affirmation of the unity of thought and being." Alas, this formula is far too equivocal for establishing a demarcation between materialism and the other philosophical tendencies. The idealist Hegel, as I have already indicated, not only could accept the formula, but it even formed the basis of his system. It is also perfectly acceptable for the whole philosophical trend designated by the term of absolute idealism.

The formula does not even establish a clear distinction between materialism and agnosticism, as Warde thinks it does. Many schools of agnostics, for whom "reality" is but a "complex of sensations" could, it seems to me, readily accept Warde's formula of the "unity of thought and being."

Warde appears to mean by "being" the external world, nature, matter, reality. But, in that case, the term "unity of thought and being" is rather vague, and I am not even sure it is quite correct. The doctrine of materialism is particularly clear: life and then thought appeared at certain stages in the evolution of matter. Why not state it in these simple terms? Why use equivocal formulas into which a large dose of idealism can steal?

Although Warde speaks of Warde's "uncompromising and unambiguous materialist position," this affirmation is far from reassuring us when it is surrounded by formulations as vague as "unity of thought and being." A little further, Warde writes about "the interconnection between appearances and essences, thought-forms and objective things, mind and matter." This is as equivocal as "unity". Materialism does not merely speak of "interconnection", but rather of derivation: mind came out of matter. In the "unity" and the "interconnection", matter is primary, original, mind is secondary, derived. If this point is not stressed, the difference with idealism fades.

In relation to these ambiguous formulations on materialism, I have to mention one of Warde's most astonishing assertions: "What we know, and know truly, really exists -- otherwise we should not be able to know it." Warde's artifice consists in having introduced the word "truly". If "truly" is understood as referring to

absolute truth, the proposition becomes a tautology. But it is precisely the most valuable lesson of dialectic that knowledge of absolute truth is inaccessible. Thought progresses through successive approximations. As Engels so very well said, "the history of the sciences is the history of the gradual elimination of this (primitive) nonsense, that is to say, of its replacement by a new nonsense, but less and less absurd." What an excellent formula, and how far from Warde's immediate equating of thought and being!

The adaptation (what Warde calls "unity") of thought to reality is not at all immediate and complete. It is a long process that appears to us as the historical development of knowledge. This process is not a mere additive accumulation, that is, a truth perfectly formed that comes in its right place besides other truths already acquired. No, knowledge grows through a constant and general reorganization. Each truth is reinterpreted and integrated in a new context, when new truths are discovered. Truth thus reveals its relative character.

It is hard to see how this historical process can take place for Warde, who immediately "unites" thought and being. That is why he does not see the distinction between the development of reality ("being", "matter") and the development of our knowledge of reality ("thought"). I illustrated this point in BR with the evolution of the theories of light, which does not "reflect" any evolution of light.

With the progress of knowledge, old concepts reveal themselves powerless to grasp reality, contradictions appear. Tc overcome them, new concepts have to be created. Thus, to take a very simple example, physics, which originally dealt with the qualitative concepts of warm and cold, later on had to create the much more elaborated quantitative concept of temperature. The adoption of this new concept was forced upon the physicist by the inability of the old ones to explain phenomena sufficiently well. But the progress of one concept to another is clearly a progress of our knowledge of physical bodies, for they are the same before and after the adoption of the new concept.

Our human knowledge is not at all an immediate "unity of thought and being", but a process of successive approximations. The study of this process of closer and closer approximation is the field of dialectic. In spite of Warde's prattle about my agnosticism, my positivism, etc., etc., this conception of dialectic, as dealing with the historical progress of knowledge, does not conflict in any way with the materialist doctrine of emergence of mind out of matter.

A lesson by Lenin in orthodoxy

Polemicizing against a Russian liberal-populist, Lenin mentioned Engels' well-known examples (the grain of barley, etc.) and wrote: "For everybody it is obvious that the center of gravity of Engels' argumentation lies in the fact that the task of the materialists is

to correctly and precisely represent the real historical process, -- and that the insistence on dialectic, the selection of examples which demonstrate the truth of the triad, are nothing but vestiges of this Hegelianism, out of which scientific socialism has grown; they are nothing but vestiges of its means of expression. As a matter of fact, once it has been categorically declared that to "demonstrate" anything whatsoever through the triad is absurd, and that nobody thinks of doing it, -- what importance can the examples of "dialectical" processes have? Is it not clear that all this is only an indication of the origin of the doctrine and nothing more?"

I will not go into a thorough discussion of Lenin's affirmations, for in a separate article I intend to examine Lenin's conception of dialectic. For the present I only note that, while defending Marxism against attacks from the liberal camp, Lenin felt perfectly free to introduce a demarcation into Engels' ideas. There is, on the other hand, the "center of gravity", which consists of using the scientific method in sociology, -- as Lenin repeats many times later on, "the abandonment of the methods of idealism and subjectivism in sociology". There are, on the other hand, the means of expression of the doctrine , which are vestiges of his historical origin. Lenin did not hesitate to introduce a distinction between the two groups of ideas, even during a polemic against an adversary.

As for myself, there are in Engels ideas on dialectic that I find hard to reconcile with other ideas of the same Engels, or of Marx and of Lenin. And I find it impossible to reconcile them with my own conception. I shall explain myself at length on this point in a separate article. That this work must be done with utmost care is obvious. False steps are possible. But the guarantee against false steps is not the refusal to go forward, but the collective vigilance and control of the organization during the discussion. Lenin found it possible to reject some of Engels' ideas about dialectic even during a polemic against a liberal on this very subject. I do not see why Lenin's conception of orthodoxy should be too broad for us.

Warde's loud claims to orthodoxy -- not Lenin's conception, but a strict adherence to every detail, -- are palpably false. Warde speaks of "material contradictions" (?!), which, as far as I know, Engels never mentioned. Warde presents Engels as a "consistent disciple of Hegel", which he certainly was not. As for Warde's materialism, I think his formulations need a great deal of clarification, as we have seen, before he can raise too high claims to orthodoxy on that subject.

May I say, in concluding this point, that one can show infinitely more respect for Engels' great personality, more fidelity to his teachings and more deference for his memory, by openly criticizing some of his opinions than in caricaturing them with examples that are subsequently left unexplained?

Conclusion

I have not dealt with all the points raised by Warde. And such was not my intention. I intended to show the character of Warde's answer; a lack of answer dissimulated behind smokescreens. I examined three of these smokescreens and I straightened out my ideas on the points where they had been particularly distorted by Warde's presentation. I have not mentioned the numerous minor smokescreens that combine with the big ones to conceal the central vacuum. I shall now present two of these minor smokescreens as examples of the rest.

Warde takes, without quoting exactly, my sentence that "we observe, especially at certain periods, a strong resistance to any idea of change...". Vehemently, he shouts to me that people do not oppose the idea of change, but change itself. And this accusation becomes part of his more general one, which we have already examined, that I give "no objective reality to change." A few days ago, rereading Trotsky's article on National-Socialism in the February 1943 Fourth International, I accidentally came across this sentence: "A petty bourgeois is hostile to the idea of development." Suppose some adversary would have said: "The fascist petty bourgeois does not oppose the idea of development, but development itself. Trotsky seeks to cover Nazism. His collaboration with Hitler is proved once more." I imagine Trotsky's ironical answer. The relation between opposing the idea of change and opposing change is so clear that only someone badly in want of an argument could start a quarrel on that point.

The second example of a minor smokescreen I will give is the following. Warde writes: "Loris expressly forbids anyone to inquire into the nature of reality." Although the word "expressly" is used, this statement must not be taken as a correct presentation of my conception. In BR I dealt with Warde's statement: "The basic problem of philosophy is the question: what is the nature of reality?" He clearly presented the problem as a task of philosophy, and I rejected this task as meaningless and empty. Thus Warde's correct statement of my conception should have been that I refused to inquire into the nature of reality by means of philosophy, that is to say, of a special discipline different from the sciences. As to the nature of reality, it is revealed to us by the whole of the sciences. True, this picture is relative, incomplete and unfinished. But no other can claim to be superior and even, by far, equal.

In warfare smokescreens are used to conceal offensive operations. Warde uses them for something different, for dissimulating the absence of operations, that is, his lack of answers to the questions I asked him about his examples. Warde enumerates I do not know how many "errors" and "mistakes" which I have allegedly committed. Let us suppose for a moment that he is right. Let us suppose that I committed two, three, even ten times more errors and mistakes than he claims. This does not at all release him from the responsibility of answering my questions about his examples, for these

questions remain pertinent in spite of all my errors and mistakes. And Warde's obligation to answer is not an obligation to me, of course, but to the party.

A discussion is a dialogue. If the interlocutors speak without one paying attention to what the other says, the dialogue is of little interest and small profit. Asked about the content of his abstractions, Warde answers that some other abstractions are not empty. Asked about the value of his dialectical laws, he shows that the laws of geometry have a great value. Asked about the validity of a universal scheme of change, he answers that I deny change. Last but not least, asked about the meaning of his examples, he keeps silent. Thus, I see little use in pursuing this discussion with Warde as long as he maintains this attitude. I shall present my ideas in a series of articles, the first of which is nearly ready, without reference to Warde's writings. I am ready to resume the direct discussion with Warde as soon as he answers my questions about his examples, -- not before.

August 5, 1943

ANOTHER ANSWER TO COMRADE LORIS

By George Sanders

Entirely apart from the question of Comrade Warde's outline, Comrade Loris discloses a misconception of the nature of dialectical materialism as well as a disparaging attitude to the subject which, inasmuch as it is disguised, must be thoroughly exposed. This is the more necessary since questions are raised here which were an issue in the struggle with the minority. Comrade Loris was well answered in the Internal Bulletin and I shall therefore be summary in my criticism.

Comrade Loris is well aware that the objection will be raised against him: "But does not the dialectic of ideas reflect the dialectic of nature?" "The relation of logic to nature," continues Loris, "is not a simple one, and I do not intend to solve it in these brief notes." But this is merely subterfuge, for he immediately answers, clearly and unequivocally, that the dialectic of ideas has nothing whatsoever to do with the dialectic of nature, that in fact there is no such thing as the dialectic of nature. Says Loris: "All the themes of dialectic have a great value in the epistemological field, but become empty abstractions outside." Says Hook: "The fundamental presupposition of all the laws of dialectic is the belief that contradiction is objectively present in things and processes. To say the very least, this is a strange use of the term contradiction, for since the time of Aristotle it has been a commonplace of logical theory that propositions or judgements or statements are contradictory, not things or events." Said Duehring: "Contradiction is a category which can appertain only to a combination of ideas, but not to reality."

If Comrade Loris is right, than assuredly so was Burnham when he charged that Trotsky dragged the question of dialectics into the discussion as a red herring. If Comrade Loris is right, then what do we mean by "materialism" when we refer to our philosophy as "dialectical materialism?" If the laws of dialectic apply to mind and not to matter than what is materialistic about our philosophy? Or does Loris (since I suppose he is not an idealist) maintain that matter impresses a specific nature on mind without partaking of that nature itself?

That would seem to be the case. He writes: "Let us take an elementary proposition of dialectic, the universality of change. Applied to nature, this 'law' has no great value, for the movement of an atom does not follow the same pattern as the development of a cell, the solar system does not follow the same scheme of evolution as capitalist society. The 'law' remains quite barren." He goes on to show that the "law" is, however, "extremely valuable on the epistemological plane" because it "simply expresses in an inverted form the resistance of the human mind to change." If it is necessary to go through such mental contortions to render "an elementary proposition of dialectic" applicable to epistemology, its

sole remaining field, then I think it were better to forget about it altogether and to discard it utterly.

But Comrade Loris contradicts himself. In the very paragraph intended to prove by example that "all the themes of dialectic have a great value in the epistemological field, but become empty abstractions outside," it turns out that the example "has put us on the track of a very important epistemological fact, which has deep ramifications in psychology ... and in social science." But why in social science? Comrade Loris began by isolating mind from the rest of nature and he ends by isolating society from the rest of nature. All this in order to defend Marx's doctrine from Warde's supposed affirmation of its semi-religious character! There would at least be nothing semi-religious, nor semi-Marxist, in Loris' affirmations, if he drew his arguments to a conclusion.

Bourgeois ideology has two faces, when all of its aspects are generalized, and between them it divides the labor of maintaining fear, ignorance, brutality and order. In the direction of the lowly--to whom, it would appear, the question of "the fundamental feature of reality" is full of meaning -- it presents a unified world-outlook, that of religion, wherein nature and life and the problems and sufferings relative to them find unity and resolution in the supernatural. In the direction of those hardier and more sophisticated souls to whom "the question of 'the fundamental feature of reality' seems meaningless," such as Loris, disunity, disharmony, disconnection appear, most often received indifferently, in the absence of their opposite, but sometimes positively accepted as the basis for an "outlook."

In the same paper to which I have already referred, Professor Burnham wrote: "There are no fundamental questions 'in general,' Comrade Trotsky. Within each systematized field of knowledge there are certain principles which can be regarded, from the point of view of that field, as fundamental: either in the logical sense of being the basic axioms, postulates, and theorems upon which the logical structure of the field rests; or in the instrumental sense of being the directing aim or purpose which the field serves. But in each field to which we may refer, there are different fundamentals'" (the emphasis is Burnham's.) Comrade Loris implies that this is the school of thought to which he adheres and he attempts to reconcile this position with the philosophy of dialectical materialism. The task is hopeless. The two are as irreconcilable as are the class interests which they respectively defend. Ex-minority leader Burnham, understanding this fact, attacked dialectical materialism far more consistently and logically than Comrade Loris defends it.

The nature of reality is "a fundamental question 'in general'" the answer to which is the foundation of the Marxist structure. Marxism holds that reality is of a material nature; that from this fact another fundamental proposition necessarily follows: the universality of motion, of change; that there are certain general laws of motion -- and it is precisely the universality of these laws which caused them first to be investigated as a branch of philosophy, dialectics.

Marx, being a Marxist and a social scientist, "transferred" dialectics "into the external world" of economics and history. Engels gave examples of the operation of the laws of dialectic in mathematics, physics, and chemistry. Since he was not a scientist in any of these fields in the sense in which Marx was a scientist in the field of economics, he could only indicate their application; he could not utilize them as a tool for further investigation and discovery, as a creative factor, like Marx did. But a theorist in any field can apply the dialectic as fruitfully as Marx -- provided only that he is as good a dialectician and a scientist as Marx was.

Comrade Loris tries to bolster up his argument with two examples, both of which prove the opposite of that which he intends them to. In the first example he shows that "the history of the theories of light is very rich and follows a pattern that one may call dialectical. ...But this development of theories does not 'reflect' any development of light." Therefore, concludes Loris, it is mind alone which has undergone a dialectical development, not light. But mind has undergone a dialectical development in its study of light not because mind has a special dialectical nature, but because light itself is a dialectical phenomenon, a perfect and beautiful example of matter in motion, whose contradictory aspects have only gradually been embraced by the mind.

Comrade Loris' second example has already been quoted: "Applied to nature, this 'law' (the universality of change) has no great value, for the movement of an atom does not follow the same pattern as the development of a cell, the solar system does not follow the same scheme of evolution as capitalist society, etc." But each aspect of nature which Loris calls upon here is another proof of the validity of "that elementary proposition of dialectic, the universality of change," which is again, as Loris' examples indicate, "a fundamental question 'in general.'" Comrade Loris is right when he implies that this proposition does not tell us the difference between the evolution of the solar system and the evolution of capitalist society, but surely the mind whose workings are consistent with it is better equipped for research in these fields than the mind repugnant to it. And this is not because of the purely epistemological significance of the proposition, but because the reality under investigation is an affirmation of its validity.

Some contradictions are dialectical while others are absurd. Absurd contradictions are those which exist in the mind "but become empty abstractions outside." Opponents of the dialectic and opportunist counterfeiters palm off absurd contradictions as examples of dialectical contradictions, the first in order to disprove the dialectic, the second in order to bolster up a false policy. The Stalinists maintain that the imperialist war has undergone a dialectical transformation and has become a people's war, but since this has not occurred in reality the contradiction is absurd, not dialectical. The attitude of the Stalinists to the imperialist war, which is also a material fact, has however undergone a dialectical transformation: opposition has changed to support. But just as the solar system evolves in accordance with its own nature and not in accordance with

capitalist society, so the Stalinists evolved in accordance with their own nature and were opportunists when they opposed the war as they are now when they support it. Yet even a Stalinist can, under certain circumstances, undergo a dialectical transformation and change into his opposite, a Trotskyist.

The first-mentioned critics of the dialectic, far less dangerous than its Stalinist defenders, are dealt with by Engels in Anti-Duehring, particularly in Chapter XIII, Part One.

Loris directs his criticism supposedly against Comrade Warde, but in reality he takes issue with Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky. If he intends to pursue his argument he should frankly direct it against the great scientists of our movement. In that case the discussion would not center around Warde's cursory outline notes, but around a work like Anti-Duehring, in the preface to which Engels writes: "I had no doubt about the general proposition -- that in nature the same dialectical laws of motion assert themselves in the maze of innumerable changes as dominate the seemingly accidental events in history."

In conclusion I offer an example of the application of the dialectic to a field removed from both the natural and the social sciences. I quote in length from an article entitled "Functional Harmony in a Twelve-Tone Sound-World," by George Perle, which appeared in the Winter 1940 issue of the Bulletin of the Peabody Conservatory of Music. First, however, let the comrades recall some basic concepts of the dialectic: the unity of opposites, the change of quantity into quality, the negation of the negation. They will see each proposition in turn clearly illustrated, as well as the relation of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

"Diatonic tonality was characterized by two properties: first, a key-center, by means of which the position of the scale in the cycle of fifths was established; second, the process of modulation, which enabled us to transfer the position of the scale within the cycle of fifths so that new tones could be introduced into a composition without destroying the established relationships. These fundamental attributes were mutually dependent, and yet at the same time contradictory. (unity of opposites; G.S.). It is within the contradiction between the key-center (thesis; G.S.), or the principle of stability, and the modulatory process, (antithesis; G.S.), or the principle of mobility, that we find the motivating force of the evolution of diatonic tonality.

"It is self-evident that the more rapidly we shift the key-center, or modulate, the less stable is the key-center. In early tonal works modulation was used with caution. Composers seldom modulated beyond the most closely related keys, thus introducing only one new tone at a time. Gradually the modulatory process became more free and more rapid. With the advent of Romanticism the principle of mobility began to gain the upper hand, until, in advanced works at the end of the last century, the key-center shifted its position in the cycle of fifths with such rapidity that we could scarcely follow

it. At last modulation annihilated the key-center (change of quantity into quality; G.S.), but in doing so it destroyed itself (negation of the negation; G.S.), for modulation was only a function of the key-center.

"The destruction of tonality was partially due to an increasing awareness of new harmonies. The evolving musical mind became conscious of progressively deeper relationships in the overtone-series ("one may object: 'But does not the dialectic of ideas reflect the dialectic of nature?'"-- M. Loris). By the end of the 19th century the ear had begun to accept harmonies which were incapable of functional significance in tonality (change of quantity into quality; G.S.). Thus, three centuries after its inception, the diatonic tonal system disintegrated, due not only to the force of its inner contradictions, but also to the invasion of alien factors through an evolving consciousness of ever deeper material relationships.

"The wanderings of the seven-tone scale within the cycle of fifths had expanded our tone-world, which now consists of the circle of twelve tones. Arnold Schoenberg was the first to recognize the new world in his inauguration of a musical style which has since come to be known as atonality (synthesis; G.S.)."

July 31, 1943

REPLY TO COMRADE BREITMAN ON CHICAGO UNITED FRONT MOTION

By M. Morrison

Comrade Breitman's defense of the motion of the Political Committee with reference to the Chicago united front proposal is an excellent example of how an attempt to defend an incorrect and confusing proposition must inevitably lead to ever greater confusion.

The defense starts off with a statement that the motion is subject to misinterpretation. No reasons are given why that is so. The motion in clear language states the following proposition: a united front with other organizations against the "Mission To Moscow" film is impractical and not advantageous because we have a principled difference with these organizations on the question of the defense of the Soviet Union. One can say that this is an illogical proposition because there does not seem to be, and in fact there is not, any relationship between the statement that a united front is impractical or not advantageous with the reason given as to why it is not practical or advantageous. One can say that it is an incorrect proposition and proceed to prove it. But it can hardly be said that it is subject to misinterpretation. And Breitman proceeds to defend the motion in such a way that it is impossible to say how he would have it changed so that it would not be subject to misinterpretation.

In my article against the motion I contend that its adoption implies the acceptance of the idea that a united front against "Mission To Moscow" is impermissible with any organization opposed to the defense of the Soviet Union because of that principled difference. I also state that the motion was a half-retreat from that position. That, I think, is too cautious a formulation. Breitman's article proves that the motion in effect states that it is impermissible for us to have a united front against "Mission To Moscow" with any organization that does not agree with us on the question of the defense of the Soviet Union.

Breitman assures us that he would not accept such a "principled position". But then, in the latter part of his article he proceeds to tell us that he would have a united front if these organizations would change their attitude on the question of the defense of the Soviet Union.

If one favors a united front with organizations provided they change their attitude on a basic principle does that not mean that he opposes the united front because of that principle? One can talk himself blue in the face about the united front being impractical or disadvantageous but this kind of talk is absolutely immaterial and serves only to confuse the issue.

Ultra-leftists opposed the whole united front tactic on the ground that we could not have a united front with organizations that are opposed to revolutionary Marxism. Suppose they had said: "No, we do not oppose the united front because of the principled difference on the question of the revolution. We oppose it only because

this principled difference makes the united front impractical or disadvantageous". Would the change in phraseology alter the essential nature of their opposition to the united front? Of course not! It would simply mean that in addition to being wrong in principle they would also be violating logic and common sense. For, as I showed in my previous article on this question, there is no relationship between the practical aspects of the united front and the principled difference pointed to as a reason for the united front being impermissible.

And therein lies the importance and the danger of this motion. An ultra-leftist opposition to any united front can always take refuge in this type of formulation.

* * *

The arguments advanced by Breitman in defense of the motion can each be dismissed with a sentence or two. To show that a principled difference can make a united front disadvantageous he cites a very curious example. We would not, he says, "enter into a united front with the Social-Democrats for the creation of a labor party so that Roosevelt could be elected." A very profound proposition, indeed! Breitman tells us that we would not enter into a united front for a purpose hostile to our program! He might as well have said that we would not enter into a united front with the Social-Democrats to attack the Soviet Union because this would not be advantageous. He would, I am certain, meet with no opposition to such a proposition.

At times the confusion in Breitman's article becomes almost painful. Read the following propositions contained in one paragraph.

1. The principled differences make advantageous united front actions over "Mission To Moscow" not realizable.

2. We would agree to such a united front if it would be advantageous. (I presume only if the Social-Democrats would change their position on the principled difference).

3. But these principled differences prevent the Social-Democrats from entering a united front on a basis acceptable to us.

If a united front with the Social-Democrats is not advantageous, what difference does it make whether the Social-Democrats would accept or reject a proposal from us? It is the principled difference that makes an advantageous united front not realizable, according to the motion. How can that possibly be changed by the acceptance or rejection of a united front by the Social-Democrats? Of course Breitman presupposes that the Social Democrats would never accept a united front proposal on our basis. But what would Breitman do if he offered it and they did accept it? What then would happen

to the proposition that the principled difference makes a united front disadvantageous?

In my first article I admitted the possibility that the Social-Democrats might reject a united front because of the principled difference, although in actuality at the present, they claim to be defending the Soviet Union. But that would simply mean that the Social-Democrats would proceed on the basis of the same error that the proponents of the motion accept.

But how about the Workers' Party, which is the only group having a principled position against the defense of the Soviet Union? Would that party also not accept a united front on the basis of our terms?

All that Breitman's confusion succeeds in proving is my contention that there is no relationship between the principled difference and practicality and advantageousness. If one is opposed to a united front because it is not practical or advantageous then he must argue on the basis of practical factors and not mix in any principle that has no place in the argument.

Once again I point out that I am not arguing for or against the Chicago proposal. I am arguing against a motion which prevents an intelligent discussion of the practical factors that might make the proposal acceptable or unacceptable. Obviously, if one says that the principled difference makes a united front impractical or disadvantageous, there can be and there need be no discussion on any concrete practical factors.

* * *

Breitman quotes me correctly when he says that I would not favor a united front unless the Social-Democrats would agree to one acceptable to us. From this, by some queer logic, Breitman deduces that "Morrison is opposed to united front action (without the proper agreement) because of principled differences over the U.S.S.R." My dear comrade Breitman, I would oppose a united front on any question unless it would be on a basis acceptable to us. Does that mean that I am opposed to a united front because of principled differences?

The undoubted fact is cited by Breitman that, at their own meetings the Social-Democrats and the Socialists speak in a manner which is not at all acceptable to us. It is also true that at our own meetings we speak in a manner not acceptable to them. But all this is of course irrelevant. What we are after is a united front on some common basis with an agreement clearly defining that basis.

And then comes the most startling argument of all. In answer to my statement that I do not know of any case where the Social-Democrats broke a promise to refrain from attacking the Soviet Union, Breitman says: That is true but they never made any promise. And Breitman apparently knows before-hand that they would not make any such promise. Which reminds me of the wise scholastics who were

opposed to testing the proposition made by Galileo to the effect that bodies of different weights would all reach the earth at one time if dropped from a height, on the ground that Aristotle's proposition said differently.

Comrade Breitman also fears that the branches of our party would go wild in "testing" the united front. To that I can only say: if you are afraid that the branches would go on a united front spree tell them not to do so. And don't forget we have a rule that before a united front can be consummated the branch must have the authority of the Political Committee.

Do not permit an unjustified fear to drive you into a motion that is incorrect from every point of view.

September 13, 1943