IT IS THE LEAST of this book's merits that it brings together a broader and more intelligently conceived range of texts treating the interaction between Marxism and revolution in Asia than has ever before been assembled within one volume. Beginning with Marx's scattered writings on India, China and the characteristics of the peasantry, it traces with well-judged selectivity the evolution of Marxist thinking about revolution in the East through debates inside the Second International, the works of Lenin, resolutions of the Communist International, right down to contemporary Soviet views on national democracy. In the period after 1917 these documents are balanced by others taken from the contributions to Marxism by Chinese Marxists and communists, and particularly, of course, Mao Tse-tung.

The result is a fascinating and complex chronicle, in which we can follow at first hand the genesis and development of many of the disputes and conflicts which have bedevilled and agitated Marxists right down to the present day (incidentally reminding us that, in the realm of ideology, at any rate, there is nothing new under the sun). Many of the texts are well-known and have attained the status of hallowed authorities; others again are obscure, but significant passages from such forgotten figures as the Tatar communist Sultan Galiev or Mao's early teacher and friend, Li Ta-chao.


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There are so many issues raised in this material that those who delight in unravelling the maze of tactical, organisational and strategic questions which occupy so much of the time of revolutionary socialists will find endless food for speculation and controversy. The great contribution of the authors, however, is to provide a long introductory essay which separates the wood from the trees and brilliantly uncovers the basic processes at work beneath the perennial argumentation of the ideologues. The central theme of this challenging overview is of such importance and contemporary relevance as to demand brief outline and discussion.

D’Encausse and Schram regard the development and transformation of Marxism as indissolubly bound up with the ‘dis-Europeanisation’ of the world, which is one of the fundamental features of our time. Marx was, as they emphasise, a thoroughgoing Europeanist culturally, notwithstanding his immense world vision, and his concept of world revolution was set within the context of the spread of the dynamic qualities of modern European civilisation, whose attainments he celebrated as he pilloried the social relationships which fettered its further progress. Socialism to him represented the crowning culmination of Western development; its pre-condition was capitalist industrialisation, which for the first time in history created the prospect of abundance and hence the possibility of transcending the class exploitation, the stunting division of labour and the alienation which scarcity economics made inescapable. Industrialisation also furnished the gravediggers of capitalism, those who had nothing to lose but their chains, the workers who in the act of freeing themselves would lay the foundations for universal freedom.

In his sparse writings on the underdeveloped world Marx manifested his belief in the transforming role of productive technique, the decisive revolutionary mission of the European proletariat and the static character of the “Oriental mode of production” in Asia. While his later work showed a tendency to recognise some potential for socialism in “archaic” systems and classes (as, for example, in his discussion of the Russian commune, and his remarks on the peasants generally), he remained convinced that only revolutionary changes in Europe and North America could precipitate socialist transformations on a world scale.

It is no secret any longer that it was Lenin who mediated the adaptation of Marxism to Asia. The very nature of Russia, situated geographically and culturally midway between Europe and Asia, contributed in no small measure to the determination of Lenin’s ideas. He compensated for the weakness of the proletariat by elevating the role of party organisation and the professional revo-
olutionary, and proposing a class alliance with the peasantry, and so fashioned an instrument for revolution in underdeveloped countries. He also recognised, as Marx had not, the importance of the national question in revolutionary strategy. His analysis of imperialism, which gave rise to the theory of the "weakest link in the chain", and his adoption of Trotsky's thesis of uninterrupted revolution (by which the capitalist stage could be bypassed) provided the justification for jettisoning the deterministic aspects of Marxism and enabling communists in underdeveloped countries to seize power in the name of the proletariat and socialism.

It was small wonder that it was to Lenin rather than Marx that Asian radical intellectuals looked for answers to the problems that agitated them in the age of national awakening in the East. His works were read wherever revolutionary nationalists discussed the nature of imperialist oppression, the struggle for emancipation, the formation of national states, the ways of overcoming the legacies of economic backwardness and cultural submission.

But Lenin himself remained sufficient of a Europeanist to believe that revolution in the advanced West would be needed to make a socialist revolution in Russia viable, and to discount the possibility of revolutions in Asia succeeding without the help of the European proletariat. But the impatience for change which had led him to hurdle the obstacles to immediate revolution in Russia soon affected Asian revolutionaries also. The first manifestation of this in the communist movement was the dispute between Lenin and the Indian communist M. N. Roy at the second congress of the Communist International. Where Lenin was cautious about revolutionary prospects in the East, and advised the communists there to accept the hegemony of the national bourgeoisie in the colonial emancipation struggle, Roy's burning nationalism expressed itself in giving Asia a central place in the world revolution and conceiving the ability of the oppressed colonial proletariat to lead the national liberation movement directly to socialism. The dispute between Lenin and Roy, and the later interventions of Sultan Galiev, prefigured, in spirit if not in letter, the later conflicts that were to develop between the Soviet and Asian communist movements.

Mao Tse-tung took up where Lenin and Roy left off. His wedding of nationalism and Marxism inspired by Li Ta-chao, Mao by 1925 (in his report on the peasant movement in Hunan province) had already arrived at the conviction which was to dominate his life's work, that the poor peasantry of China constituted an irresistible and inexhaustible tide of revolutionary spirit which could be harnessed to the transformation of his country. In the aftermath of the debacle of the Comintern's policy of uniting with the "national
bourgeoisie" in the Kuomintang, Mao proceeded to put his belief to the test, with results that are now history. In the process he further transformed Marxism by eliminating the revolutionary role of the industrial proletariat (except in ritualistic terms) and obliterating the relationship between socialism and advanced technology.

D’Encausse and Schram rightly see in this evolution more than the revision of a doctrine to fit revolutionary exigencies. It represented an historic meeting between Marxism and the national reassertion of Asians, which profoundly affected both. In China, with its millenia of distinctive development and its rich culture and political traditions, the problem affecting all colonial peoples, that of “modernising while remaining themselves,” was felt most acutely and could not be resolved by accepting a tutelary status to Europeans and European thought. Marxism had to be Sinified, and China had to assert the relevance of her revolutionary model for the rest of Asia.

The more the Soviet Union under Stalin and his successors came to identify the interests of world revolution with the interests of the USSR as a state (a tendency which, as the authors point out, had already begun under Lenin), the more the seeds of the great schisms of our time were sown. Many elements enter into the Sino-Soviet conflict, but underly ing it and intensifying its manifestations is the antagonism between Soviet paternalism and Asian national pride. Russian disregard for the interests of Asian communists is nowhere more clearly revealed than in the contemporary theory of “national democracy” which, stripped of its ideological trimmings, assesses the social character of third world regimes solely by reference to their susceptibility to Soviet influence. In recent times, as this book documents, Soviet theorists have even come to view the military in these countries as “objectively” a force for transformation in the direction of socialism. That this has not remained merely a theoretical exercise is illustrated by the case of Indonesia, where in 1964-65 Soviet representatives shifted their support away from the pro-Chinese Indonesian Communist Party and undertook negotiations with anti-communist military leaders through representatives of the small but influential Murba Party.

In their contest with the Soviet the Chinese have elaborated their own strategic world view. Ironically, they have taken up a Comintern formulation referring to the underdeveloped countries as “the villages of the world”, and converted it from a term of disparagement to one of pride. To the Chinese, the Western countries constitute a “burnt-out revolutionary hearth”, and the revolutionary future lies with the third world. Implicitly, they believe that contradictions
between classes are less fundamental than contradictions between the developed and underdeveloped regions. In this, they arrive at conclusions similar to those of some Western scholars, who see a developing "convergence" between industrial countries irrespective of political coloration.

While the Chinese are undoubtedly more influenced by ideological factors than are the Russians, there is also a greater element of state interest in the basic Chinese concept than is often realised. For a country which aspires to challenge the great powers, but is deficient in conventional power resources, it makes sense to encourage liberation struggles in their hinterlands as a means of weakening them, tying down their forces, and ultimately extracting concessions from them.

In the course of its Eastern migration, as we have seen, virtually the whole of Marx's scheme of social revolution was discarded in favour of an ever more pronounced voluntarism. Lenin initiated the trend towards elevating politics above economics; Mao carried the process still further; and it reaches its final (?) culmination in the theories of Regis Debray and some Cuban leaders, who completely eliminate the masses, class factors and the economic base from consideration and conceive revolution in terms of the willed actions of small groups of conscious elites.

The issue between determinism and voluntarism is usually argued in philosophical or ideological terms. But it seems obvious from the history of the past fifty years that the attempt to draw a "correct" line between the two in revolutionary strategy is fundamentally misconceived. The vulnerability of political systems to revolutionary action varies according to a number of factors, one of which is the depth of social penetration (political, ideological, control) which the system in question achieves. If this penetration is shallow, then a system which appears relatively stable on the surface may be overthrown by a small cadre force of revolutionaries (as was the case in Cuba). Where, on the contrary, the political power drives deep into society, it may withstand quite deepgoing economic and social crises without succumbing to much larger revolutionary movements, as the history of Western Europe confirms. An accent on voluntarism or determinism in the revolutionary movement may in large measure reflect these circumstances, so that the line between "adventurism" and "economism" will be drawn at different points under different environmental conditions.

In a sense, the revenge Marx has taken upon his voluntarist revisers has been to deny them the possibility, once they have jumped over his historical stages, of creating anything more than
a caricature of his original socialist vision. This is no more than another way of saying that Marxism in the underdeveloped world has been transformed from a theory of post-capitalist society into a vehicle for industrialisation and modernisation more acceptable in some contexts than the capitalist alternative.

While eastern Marxism developed a new voluntarist dynamic, orthodox Marxism in the West stagnated and degenerated. This leads d'Encausse and Schram to pose their concluding paradox: "When one considers both the various theories which call themselves Marxist, and the realities of the world today, it would seem that the only alternative lies in a choice between a scholastic Marxism which has nothing to do with revolution and a revolution that has nothing to do with Marxism." It is true, as they point out, that the traffic between Marxism and Asia no longer flows along a one-way street, and the radical student movement in particular has adopted many of the voluntaristic aspects of Asian Marxism. But, while the new radicals have punctured the sterile determinism of the older leftwing political structures, they appear now to be running into a cul-de-sac of their own. Meanwhile, classical Western Marxism is being revitalised in the West and applied to the still embryonic trends in post-industrial society. Out of the new technological revolution and the parallel analysis of it in Marxist terms may come a fresh dynamism, fusing the deterministic and voluntarist strains in Marx in ways more appropriate to this setting than either of the alternatives suggested by these authors.