
Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain

Principles of Marxism-Leninism

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P R I N C I P L E S O F

M A R X I S M - L E N I N I S M

An elementary course

Class One: The Development of Society

Published by:

THE MARXIST-LENINIST ORGANISATION OF BRITAIN

INTRODUCTION

The degeneration of the Communist Party of Great Britain into a new "Labour Party", serving the interests no longer of the working class and working people but the finance capitalists of Britain, has been associated not only with neglect of education in Marxist-Leninist principles, but with the perversion of those principles themselves.

This is natural, for education in the principles of Marxism-Leninism would make clear to any genuine Communist the complete betrayal of those principles by the leadership of the party.

The course prepared by the Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain is designed to fill this gap. It is intended primarily for probationary members and sympathisers of the Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain.

The aims of the course are to raise the political understanding of probationary members and sympathisers of the Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain by giving them a grounding in Marxism-Leninism which will enable them to understand more clearly what is happening in the world; which will enable them to determine for themselves a correct day-to-day attitude and policy on the way forward towards socialism in Britain, without awaiting a "lead" from some higher body; which will enable them to read the classics of Marx and Engels, of Lenin and Stalin with greater understanding; which will enable them to proceed to an advanced level of political understanding that will fit them for positions of leadership in the Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain, in the Marxist-Leninist Party that will be established, and in the British working class and progressive movement.

The course differs from recent syllabuses prepared by the Communist Party not only in its

content -- which is Marxist-Leninist, and not a revisionist perversion of Marxism-Leninism -- but also in its method. This rejects the method of "lecturing" which has long been the principal method of what little education has been carried on in recent years within the Communist Party and Young Communist League. Since the aim of the course is to raise the political level of those taking part, the method adopted in this course is that of controlled discussion. A leading Comrade having been appointed as tutor, it is this Comrade's function to present a series of carefully worded questions to the class. By this method Comrades have to think out for themselves the answers to the questions, which are arranged to proceed logically from one point to the next.

The answers provided in the text are not intended as model answers, but as a guide to the answer that the tutor should endeavour to draw out from the class. If a Comrade puts forward an answer to a question that is wrong in principle, the tutor should not comment but ask: "Does everyone agree?" -- endeavouring to draw out a criticism of the error and an answer to the question that is closer to the truth -- avoiding any tendency to make a Comrade who has given a wrong answer feel "small".

If it is not possible to draw out a correct answer from the class, the tutor should, in a comradely manner, point out objections to the answer put forward and, from there, make a further attempt to draw out the correct answer.

When a correct answer to a question has been put forward, the tutor should still ask: "Does everyone agree?", endeavouring to clear up any doubts that may be expressed.

Only when there appears to be general agreement on the correct answer to a question, should the tutor sum up the answer briefly and proceed to the next question.

The questions should be directed not to individual Comrades, but to the class as a whole. Some new Comrades may at first be reluctant to express a viewpoint, although the method of controlled discussion assists them to think out an answer even if they do not express it. The tutor may assist in drawing out such Comrades by asking them during the discussion: "Do you agree?".

No doubt in the course of organising classes around this syllabus, experience will suggest improvements in the content and method of the course. The Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain will be pleased to receive tutors' suggestions for improving future editions of the course in the light of experience.

THE MARXIST-LENINIST ORGANISATION OF BRITAIN

SYLLABUS

- Class One: The Development of Society.
- Class Two:
- Class Three: How Capitalism Works.
- Class Four: The State and the Road to Socialism.
- Class Five: The Party of the Working Class.
- Class Six: The National Question.
- Class Seven: War.
- Class Eight: How Socialism Works.
- Class Nine: The World Outlook of Marxism-Leninism.
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Class One: THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY

1. WHAT IS ECONOMICS?

The science of the ways in which men satisfy their material needs (for food, clothing, housing, etc.).

2. WHAT IS POLITICS?

The science of the ways in which men organise themselves in society.

(NOTE: It is broader than "the science of government"; primitive peoples, without state or government, yet have political organisation).

3. WHAT IS PRODUCTION?

The transformation of raw materials into things which men can use, that is, into products.

(NOTE: The product of one productive process, such as iron, may form the raw material of another productive process, such as engineering).

4. WHAT ARE MEANS OF PRODUCTION?

The tools which men use to carry on production -- from stone axe-head to automated plant.

5. WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPAL SOCIAL SYSTEMS KNOWN TO HISTORY?

- a. Primitive communism, as in African tribal society.
- b. Slavery, as in the Roman Empire.
- c. Feudalism, as in mediaeval Europe.
- d. Capitalism, as in Britain today.
- e. Socialism, as in the People's Republic of Albania.

6. WHAT IS EXPLOITATION?

The act of living, partly or wholly, on the work of others.

7. WHAT IS A SOCIAL CLASS?

A social group

- a) which owns means of production and lives by exploiting a class which does not; or
- b) which owns means of production and lives by its own work; or
- c) which does not own means of production and is exploited by a social class which does.

8. WHAT ARE THE BASIC SOCIAL CLASSES IN BRITAIN TODAY?

- a. The capitalist class or bourgeoisie, which owns the principal means of production and lives by exploiting the social class which does not (the working class).
- b. The middle class or petty bourgeoisie, which owns small means of production and lives primarily by its own work.
- c. The working class or proletariat, which does not own means of production and is exploited by a social class which does (the capitalist class).

9. WHICH OF THE SOCIAL SYSTEMS KNOWN TO HISTORY ARE BASED ON EXPLOITATION?

- a. Slavery (in which the slave class is exploited by the slaveowning class).
- b. Feudalism (in which the serf class is exploited by the feudal aristocracy, the lords).
- c. Capitalism (in which the working class is exploited by the capitalist class).

10. WHAT IS THE BASIC CAUSE OF HISTORICAL CHANGE FROM ONE SOCIAL SYSTEM TO ANOTHER?

The development of tools and techniques.

This development occurs within a particular social system until the point is reached where these new tools and techniques can no longer be developed -- or even used to the full -- within that particular social system. The frustrations resulting from this give rise to a political movement, the aims of which are to change the social system to a new one. Eventually this change is brought about, allowing the tools and techniques to be developed further within the new social system.

The first stage of human society was one in which tools and techniques were so primitive, and production in consequence so low, that it was possible for a man to produce only barely sufficient to keep himself and his dependents alive. There was, therefore, no surplus which anyone could take. Exploitation was impossible, means of production were communally owned, and the social system was one of primitive classless communism.

However, within primitive communism tools and techniques were developed, until the point was reached where it became possible for a man to produce more than was necessary to keep himself and his dependents alive. Until this point prisoners-of-war had usually been eaten, since they could not be turned into slaves; now, however, cannibalism came to be regarded as immoral, because it was no longer economic: by turning a prisoner-of-war into a slave, it was possible to obtain from him, not one meal, but a lifetime of meals.

Thus, as a result of the development of tools and techniques, primitive communism gave way to slavery: society became divided into two classes: a class of exploiting slaveowners and a class of exploited slaves.

But within slavery, tools and techniques were developed to the point where the purely forced labour of the slave (who worked only in order to avoid punishment) ceased to be capable of using and developing these new tools and techniques adequately. In consequence, the slaveowners gradually transformed the basis of their exploitation into a new form in which the exploited peasants were given an interest in the use and development of the new tools and techniques. Slavery was transformed into serfdom. In feudal society the serfs, although legally tied to their lord's estate, were permitted to work partly on their own strips of land. They had, however, to work also on their lord's own estate, and to hand over to him a proportion of the produce from their own strips.

But within feudalism tools and techniques were developed further. A new class of merchants and artisans appeared in the towns. The serfs, in alliance with the rising merchant class, succeeded in winning their freedom from serfdom, in commuting their labour service to a system of money rents.

But with the commutation of labour service, the lords found themselves unable to obtain labour for their private estates. To obtain this (as well as for other secondary reasons) they proceeded to "enclose" the peasants' own land, that is, to drive them from it so as to force them to seek employment as wage-labourers in order to live.

Great numbers of these dispossessed peasants migrated to the towns to seek employment with the merchants and artisans -- the working class was born. Within the framework of feudal society, a new social system -- capitalism -- began to develop.

But the merchant capitalists found their efforts to develop the new capitalist system (on which their wealth depended) frustrated by the opposition of the ruling feudal aristocracy. This frustration gave rise to a political movement to change the social system, and eventually the power of the feudal aristo-

cracy was overthrown. The capitalist class became the ruling class.

Within the framework of capitalist society, tools and techniques were developed at an unprecedented rate. In this century the point has been reached where the full use and development of these new tools and techniques is being held back by the continued existence of a social system which has outlived its usefulness to the mass of the people. This is the basis of the crisis within the capitalist world, and it has forced into existence a movement to change the socialist system to a new one: the socialist movement.

The socialist movement is based on the social class which has everything to gain and nothing to lose by the replacement of capitalism by a new society, that is, on the working class.

In this century the working class in one-third of the world has replaced capitalist society by socialist society -- although, for reasons to be considered, in many of these countries a temporary reversion to capitalism has taken place.

The task of establishing a socialist society in Britain is the historic task which faces the British working class.

11. WHAT IS MEANT BY "PROGRESSIVE"?

That which helps forward the development of society.

12. WHAT IS MEANT BY "REACTIONARY"?

That which tends to hold back, or turn back, the development of society.

13. WHAT IS THE STATE?

The machinery of force by which one class rules over the rest of the people.

In primitive communism, a classless society, there was no state machinery of force. The state came into

being with the establishment of class-divided society, since the slaveowners found it necessary to hold down the exploited slave class by force.

In slave society the state was the machinery of rule of the slaveowning class. In feudal society the state was the machinery of rule of the feudal aristocracy. In capitalist society the state is the machinery of rule of the capitalist class.

As we shall see, the working class (although it is not and will not be an exploiting class) also finds the need of its own machinery of force, its own state, in order to maintain socialist society and prevent its destruction by the capitalist class which has lost its wealth and power. Thus, in a socialist society the state is the machinery of rule of the working class.

14. WHAT IS A REVOLUTION?

The forcible replacement of the rule of one class by that of a more progressive class.

15. WHICH OF THE SOCIAL SYSTEMS KNOWN TO HISTORY WAS ESTABLISHED BY MEANS OF REVOLUTION?

a. The capitalist system, as a result of the revolutionary overthrow of the political power of the feudal aristocracy in the capitalist or bourgeois revolution.

b. The socialist system, as a result of the revolutionary overthrow of the political power of the capitalist class in the working class, proletarian or socialist revolution.

16. WHAT IS A COUNTER-REVOLUTION?

The forcible replacement of the rule of one class by that of a more reactionary class.

For example, just after the first world war the Hungarian capitalist class seized power from the working class by the counter-revolutionary overthrow of the Hungarian Soviet Republic.

17. WHAT SOCIAL CLASS WAS PUT INTO POWER BY:

- a) THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION OF 1640?
The British capitalist class.
- b) THE FRENCH REVOLUTION OF 1789?
The French capitalist class.
- c) THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION OF MARCH, 1917?
The Russian capitalist class.
- d) THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION OF NOVEMBER, 1917?
The Russian working class.

Next class:

HOW CAPITALISM WORKS.

Published by:

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