



Humanism and Revolution

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I

Marxist philosophy, as interpreted by Stalinists, was conceived as a combination of 1) "dialectical materialism," an abstract philosophical ontology-epistemology, and 2) "historical materialism," an unphilosophical, economistic view of history. The task of the first was to formulate the most general, "dialectical" laws of nature, society and human thought, and also to clarify the relationship between "mind" and "matter" ("spirit" and "nature," "thought" and "being"). The task of the second was to ascertain the relationship between the "social being" and the "social consciousness" (or between the social "infrastructure" and "superstructure"), and to discover the basic "laws" of historical development. Neither of the two contained an explicit theory of man. However, while explicitly rejecting the very possibility of a philosophical concept of man, the Stalinists have in fact elaborated a vulgar, "economistic" concept of man, according to which man is basically a "toolmaking animal," a being whose whole activity is determined by his economic production.

A number of Marxists who criticised Stalinism in the fifties and at the beginning of the sixties maintained that this was a misinterpretation of Marx's views, that there was a different concept of man in Marx, a concept according to which man is not an economic animal but a free, creative being of praxis, a being who to be

sure can be alienated from his creative possibilities, but who can also dealienate himself and realize his true human nature. Such a concept of man, according to this view, played an important part in the thinking of Marx, so that his thought could be regarded as a new form of humanism. Not all who have conceived Marx as a humanist agree on all points of their interpretation, but many do agree that Marx's philosophy is neither pure ontology concerned with the general [289] "objective laws" of the universe without regard to man, nor a concrete social theory dispensing with the general concept of man. And some interpret Marxism as a humanistic "ontology-anthropology" concentrating upon the concept of man as a free and creative being and requiring a revolutionary change of existing society.

Such an interpretation of Marxist philosophy has given it new life both in theory and practice. Not only has it opened up new vistas for many interesting theoretical problems which were suppressed or "forgotten" in Stalinism, it has also inspired many people in their practical struggle against Stalinism, for a truly human form of socialism. Naturally it has provoked bitter attacks from the ranks of international Stalinism. Thus the representatives of a humanistic interpretation of Marxism have been accused of being "revisionists," "abstract humanists," "idealists," "bourgeois liberals," and the like. Coming from a viewpoint of crude dogmatism these as-



saults cannot be regarded as a theoretical danger for the new conception of Marxist philosophy. However, during the sixties the humanist interpretation of Marxism has come to be criticized not only from the "right" (from Stalinistic dogmatism), but also from the "left"—from a number of Marxists construing an opposition between humanism and revolution and maintaining that Marxism is a theory of revolution, and not humanism.

Those who think that "revolution" (and not "humanism") should be taken as the key concept of Marxism argue that the world we live in is so entirely perverted that it could be "improved" only by being destroyed and replaced by a basically different world, in other words through that radical change we call "revolution." "Humanization" in the sense of the gradual improvement of the existing inhuman world can only increase its chances for survival. And "humanism," as the theory preaching such gradual "humanization," is essentially a conservative and even reactionary ideology.

Such criticisms have been rejected by those who think that the concept of "humanism" is essential to Marxism. In defending their own humanistic interpretation of Marxism, some of them have been inclined to dispense with the concept of revolution. And some have even maintained that revolution as a violent overthrow of social relations is necessarily inhuman, and cannot serve as a means for a transition to a new, higher form of human society. Thus we now seem to be confronted with a choice: either we have to reject humanism in the name of revolution, or we must condemn revolution in the name of humanism. Is this an inescapable alternative? Or can we try to elaborate a viewpoint which would find place for both "humanism" and "revolution"? [290]

In a number of papers which I have published since the beginning of the fifties, concepts of "humanism" and "revolution" both play an essential part. That "humanism" and "revolution" are not incompatible is implicit in these papers. However, this view has not been explicitly discussed and elaborated. Thus the question about the relationship between humanism and revolution, as it poses itself for the present author, is essentially a self-critical question. Have we been

right in joining concepts of humanism and revolution or was this due to inconsistency and lack of critical thinking?

II

Whether revolution is desirable depends on questions of definition and on matters of fact. It depends on how we use the word "revolution," but it also depends on how we see the situation in the contemporary world.

To begin with, I do not think that the term "revolution" should be used, as it sometimes is done, as simply another name for the violent change of persons or groups in power. If the shift of power is produced within one social class, it would be more adequate to talk of "putsch" or "overthrow."

I am certainly much closer to those who regard revolution as a transition of power from one social class to another. Nevertheless, not every passage of power from one class to another can be regarded as revolution. If power passes from a progressive class to a regressive, this should rather be called counterrevolution.

However, seizure of power by a progressive class, if not used to change the social order, hardly deserves the name of revolution.

The passage of power into the hands of a progressive class accompanied by the construction of a new, higher social order can more rightly claim the name of social revolution. However not every replacement of a lower social order by a higher one is revolution; revolution applies only to the creation of a qualitatively different society. What is more, even the "qualitative difference" can have "degrees." In other words, not all revolutions are equally "revolutionary." Only socialist revolution, which is directed not at the replacement of one form of exploitation by another, more progressive, but at abolishing all kinds of exploitation, at overcoming all forms of self-alienation of man, is revolution in its deepest and fullest sense.

Can a radical change of society be effected only by a transformation of social structures? I believe it is wrong to think that the transformation of [291] social institutions can be separated from the change of man, or that the change of



the social order can precede the change of man, which should follow automatically. The transformation of society and the creation of new man are possible only as two closely connected sides of the same process. Therefore it is unjustified to reserve the term "revolution" for only one aspect of this unique process. "Revolution" should be reserved for a radical change in both man and society, and only socialist revolution creating a dealienated, really human man and society (social community) is revolution in the fullest sense.

Given this concept of revolution, the question arises whether in the contemporary world revolution is still possible and desirable. Of course I cannot undertake here a detailed analysis of the contemporary world and can only indicate some relevant aspects.

If socialism in the sense of a free community of free men were a reality, all talk of revolution would be deprived of meaning. But socialism in this sense does not exist anywhere. On the contrary, we live in a time in which inhumanity in its most brutal forms is practiced on a world scale. Colonial wars, exploitation of underdeveloped countries, and oppression within the most developed countries are all too well documented. To be sure, there are countries which claim to be "socialist," or successfully "constructing socialism"; were these claims true, some countries would only require further improvements. Unfortunately, a number of too convincing analyses have shown that these claims are unfounded. Thus we maintain that social revolution is still an open question on the world scale.

Certainly, the question about the possibility and desirability of revolution could also be asked in the context of whether the time for revolution has come, and what its most appropriate forms might be.

Without disputing the importance of such concrete questions (which are by no means simple and easy), I would like to insist that they cannot invalidate the basic thesis that revolution is in principle necessary for the contemporary world. Difficulties on the way may be very great, but they cannot change the fact that there is a profound need for revolutionary transformation of the existing world if man wants to remain and fully become man.

III

How does humanism fit into the above concept of revolution? Shall we try to fuse it somehow with the revolutionary viewpoint, or shall we reject it in the name of revolution? [292]

Among the objections which could be made to humanism from a revolutionary standpoint, we shall briefly discuss only those which say that humanism is incompatible with a revolutionary attitude because it is 1) philosophically unfounded, and therefore uncritical, 2) scientifically not elaborated, and consequently abstract, 3) anthropologically naive, and hence idealistic, 4) socially superficial, which means opportunistic, 5) tactically pseudoneutral and universally tolerant, i.e. conservative, and 6) ideologically illusion-spreading, and thus reactionary. Our answers to these objections are meant not as a defense of all existing forms of humanism, but rather as the attempt to show the potentialities of revolutionary, Marxist humanism.

(1) One sometimes encountered objection to humanism is that it is "philosophically unfounded" or "uncritical" because it concentrates upon the concept of man and remains within the limits of philosophical "anthropology" and "psychology," ignoring great "metaphysical" questions about the nature and modes of Being—as if man could exist (and be understood) outside the world, by himself and alone.

This objection holds in some cases. There really are humanists interested in man only and who also think that great metaphysical controversies are irrelevant for the understanding of man. However, "uncritical," philosophically unfounded humanism is not its only possible form. If humanism is understood as creative thought directed at grasping and co-creating the essence of man, there is no reason why it should abstain from those profound metaphysical questions whose clarification is necessary for the understanding of man. Far from being confined to an "agnostic" or "skeptical" attitude toward the great ontological questions, humanism is naturally "driven" to them. And this natural "driveness" ("Angewiesenheit," as the Germans would say) has not remained a pure possibility. In



Marx's thought humanistic intentions are interwoven with investigation of the deepest "meta-physical" questions and the problems of everyday life.

(2) Another objection to humanism is that it remains too far from the real problems of living. Man does not exist as Man in general or as unified Human Nature. He is a complex being possessing many different aspects (biological, economic, political, artistic, scientific, religious, etc.). He is an historical being whose nature changes from one historical epoch to another. He is a socially diversified being, divided into social classes and other groups. And he is also an individual, every "specimen" having unique characteristics. Thus only a scientific investigation of man, which takes into account his complex and differentiated nature, could help both [293] to elaborate an adequate picture of man and to change the world in a human way. In other words what we need is not abstract humanist hairsplitting, but concrete scientific study.

This objection is also based on a misunderstanding of humanism. The recognition of a common human nature does not deny that human nature is complex, nor of the fact that it may assume different historical and social forms. Nor does a philosophical, "ontologico-anthropological" analysis of man require repudiation of a scientific investigation of various aspects or forms of man's being. On the contrary, such a philosophical analysis makes possible and requires further concrete investigation of man. In other words, the idea that humanism should be strictly separated from scientific inquiry is as unfounded as the seemingly opposite idea that it should be separated from the realm of ontology. Both ideas are based on the same ungranted assumption that humanism must remain confined within the province of a pure anthropology.

(3) A further objection to humanism is concerned not with its subject-matter or approach, but with its "content." It says that humanism is too naive and optimistic because it sees merely the "positive," "good," "virtuous" side in man, and overlooks its "negative," "bad," or "sinful" side. Humanists regard man as a free, creative

being, progressing to ever higher forms and enriching his own life by transforming himself and the nonhuman world in a human way. However, the objection says, man is not only good, kind, virtuous, free, and creative, he is also bad, demonic, immoral, dangerous, and destructive. Both sides are equally parts of human nature and it is not justified to ignore the latter.

However convincing this objection about naivete might sound, it is perhaps naive itself. Those who say that man is basically a free and creative being do not want to dispute that he can be (and as a matter of fact has been) unfree and uncreative. Uncreativity and unfreedom are modes of being of a free and creative being. In other words, only a being which can be free and creative, can be also unfree and uncreative. A being which cannot be free, cannot be unfree either. Far from denying the self-alienated existence of man, Marxist humanism sees alienation as a permanent possibility and threat. If man were merely "good," and if he had no "inhuman" side, the humanistic requirement for a radical change of man would be devoid of meaning.

(4) A fourth objection to humanism is directed not against its theses on the nature of man, but against its analysis of contemporary society and its basic social goals. Without going to the roots of present social problems [294] (says the objection), humanists see only small shortcomings in the existing system and accordingly require a series of small reforms, gradually "humanizing" the existing social system. However, existing society is not merely insufficiently human, it is seriously dehumanized and perverted. Thus for its humanization a radical, revolutionary change is necessary. True, some humanists have really been reformistic and opportunistic, but this is not a necessary consequence of humanism as such. A consistent humanist should require the overcoming of all inhumanity and this can be achieved only by a qualitative change. Thus, far from being opposed to the requirement for a radical revolutionary change, a humanistic viewpoint logically leads to it. On the other hand, those who insist on the radical "inhumanity" of the contemporary world and call for its revolutionary humanization cannot themselves dispense with the concept of humanism.



(5) A fifth objection to humanism is concerned with the methods with which it would achieve its goals. According to this objection humanism preaches love, respect, understanding, and toleration for and toward everybody, because every man, according to humanism, regardless of his individual properties, possesses a common human nature. Recommending equal love for all as a universal medicine it refuses to make any difference between social groups or individuals and it does not want to show preferences or harm anyone. Such a "neutral" attitude, which disregards the difference between the rich and the poor, the exploiter and the exploited, the oppressor and the oppressed, the happy and the unhappy is really an option to tolerate oppressors and exploiters.

This again is an appropriate objection to some forms of humanism and an inadequate criticism of others. If the humanistic requirement for equal love toward everybody is taken seriously, it cannot mean toleration of exploitation and oppression. If every man should be treated with respect, this means that those social structures should be abolished in which men are treated as objects of exploitation and oppression, as things to be mercilessly used and abused in the interests of a privileged minority. Love and the requirement for a revolutionary change of the world are thus directly linked.

(6) Nevertheless, the sixth objection says, the preaching of love, respect, and goodness, even if it is conceived as allowing or recommending revolutionary change, remains conservative and even reactionary if it refuses to participate in that revolutionary change. And this is really the case with modern humanism. It indulges in nice phrases on man, freedom, [295] creativity, and honesty, while it ignores reality where there are no traces of these niceties. Thus it creates and spreads illusions about the world we live in, conceals the truth, and helps to preserve the existing.

There is no doubt that humanist phraseology can serve and has already served such purposes. But humanism is not the only theory that has been abused in this way. Every philosophical theory, if reduced to mere phraseology and

emptied of its real content, can be misused for reactionary purposes. Thus if revolutionary humanism is abused in this way, it is not its fault; it is the responsibility of those who thus abuse it.

IV

Most of the above objections to humanism from an allegedly revolutionary standpoint were based on a misunderstanding of humanism and on its reduction to some of its historical forms. In a similar way various objections to revolution from an allegedly humanistic viewpoint are mainly based on the misunderstanding of the essence of revolution.

Among many imaginable objections to revolution we shall briefly consider only those which say that revolution is 1) bloody and therefore inhuman, 2) minoritarian, and hence undemocratic, 3) necessary, but not sufficient, 4) possible, but not necessary, 5) occasionally helpful, but often harmful, 6) phraseological and thus abusable. There are certainly many other possible objections to revolution, but a complete listing is not our purpose.

(1) One objection argues that revolution as a violent overthrow involving bloodshed and cruelty is inhuman, and therefore to be avoided. To be sure, the objectors concede, not all revolutions were equally bloody, and most of them did not regard violence as a goal in itself. Terror and brutality were most often regarded as tools for constructing a new society. But inhuman tools cannot be of much help for human goals.

This objection starts from the right historical observation that many social revolutions in the past have, as a matter of fact, involved bloodshed and cruelty. It overlooks the fact that epochs of counterrevolution and of "peaceful" conservative dominion have often involved even more bloodshed and inhumanity. The objection also rightly maintains that high human goals cannot be achieved by low inhuman means. But it uncritically assumes that terror and brutality are essential to revolution. However, not cruelty but the creation of a qualitatively different man and society is the [296] essence of revolution. Its goals cannot be achieved without



the use of power, but they cannot be achieved with violence either.

(2) Another objection to revolution says that even if it is not brutal, it is undemocratic, because it is a radical social change executed by a minority against the will of the majority. All changes in which the majority is interested can be achieved by gradual evolution without force, violence, and revolution.

This objection again disregards the historical fact that throughout centuries minorities have ruled over majorities and that for their overthrow the use of power by the majority was necessary. Thus there is no ground for maintaining that revolution is of necessity a minority action. On the contrary, revolution in its full sense is a creative collective activity in which the majority of people takes part. Only the majority through their own self-activity can fundamentally change their own social relationships and themselves.

(3) A third objection to revolution says that although it may be a necessary precondition for the construction of a truly human society, it is not sufficient. A revolution may overthrow a conservative government or destroy oppressive institutions, but this is not enough. The period of revolutionary destruction should be followed by "positive" or "constructive" development creating new human relationships.

This is certainly a requirement with which we could agree, but the concept of revolution cannot be reduced to a political change. What in the above objection is taken as the postrevolutionary period of constructive development is really the essence of revolution. As has already been said, "revolution" if not followed by the creation of a new man and society is not revolution but a political "putsch." None of the great revolutionaries was prepared to reduce revolution to a mere "putsch." Revolution, as Lenin conceived it, is an "incredibly complicated and painful process of the withering away of the Old, and of the birth of a new social order, a new way of life for scores of millions of people."

(4) A fourth objection would be that although revolution can be one way for overcoming hu-

man alienation and establishing a really human society, it is not the only way. A really human society could also be established via slow evolution, through a number of continuous small changes. Therefore the insistence on revolution as the only possible way to a humanist society may prove extremely harmful, preventing the use of forms and methods which might be more efficient in some historical situations.

But revolution as an "incredibly complicated and painful process" does [297] include small, continuous changes. Thus there is no necessity to construe unbridgeable opposition between "revolution" and "evolution." The decisive question is, however, whether a series of small changes remains within the limits of the existing social order, or whether it negates it and inaugurates a basically different community of men. In the first case we have a process helping to improve and strengthen the existing social order, in the second case a qualitative change or revolution. It is impossible to have qualitative change without revolution simply because revolution *is* such a qualitative change.

(5) A fifth objection to revolution would say that, although revolution might be necessary in principle, it might be undesirable in a concrete historical situation, when the conditions for revolution are not yet ripe. Revolution on all conditions leads to an avanturism which brings great damage to progressive social forces, by giving a welcome excuse to reactionaries.

A simple answer is that a revolutionary attitude does not require revolution under all conditions. The thesis that only revolution can create a new man and society is not equivalent to the thesis that the time for a social revolution is always ripe. A revolutionary attitude and an avanturistic preaching of social revolution regardless of situation have nothing in common. Revolutionaries have often stressed that a "revolutionary situation" is a necessary precondition for revolution. But a revolutionary attitude is certainly also opposed to that opportunistic attitude for which the time for revolution will never come. There can certainly be no guarantee for a revolution's success but it is not possible to be man without being prepared to take some human risks.



(6) A sixth objection to revolution is really directed against the misuse of revolutionary phraseology. Although revolution itself might be desirable, the objection says, the talk on revolution might be a veil used to hide the opportunistic position of some people who, maintaining that they are preparing themselves for a great revolution in the future, abstain from allegedly "small" progressive actions in the present.

Here again we are not confronted with an objection to revolution, but with the possibility of abusing a theory, a possibility which exists for every theory and for which no theory as such can be made responsible. A theory can be responsible only for the consequences, which follow from it. Thus revolution cannot be responsible for the counterrevolutionary distortions and misuses of the revolutionary theory. On the contrary, opportunistic and counterrevolutionary theories and practices can be exposed only with the help of a true revolutionary theory and activity. [298]

V

We can now go back to the central question from which we started: Are we to reject humanism in the name of revolution, or shall we condemn revolution in the name of humanism?

I hope the above discussion has shown that this is a false alternative. Consistent humanism which does not want to stop half-way demands a radical negation of existing inhumanity and the creation of a qualitatively different, truly human society. In other words it demands revolution. On the other hand true revolution cannot be satisfied with small social changes, it requires the creation of a qualitatively different, really human man and society. In other words it requires a radical humanization of existing man and society.

The whole meaning of this paper could thus be summed up in the thesis that there can be no genuine humanism without a real revolutionary attitude, nor a truly revolutionary attitude without real humanism. Revolutionary humanism is the only full humanism, and humanist revolution is the only true revolution. In other words, revolutionary humanism and a humanist revolutionary attitude are one.

All our replies to objections were directed in the same basic direction: to demonstrate the inseparability of humanism and revolution, and to show that revolutionary humanism and humanist revolution are the only alternatives for our time. There has been considerable repetition in these answers. But at a time when humanity is repeatedly endangered and violated by aggressive inhumanity, a repetitive insistence on both humanism and revolution seems indispensable.