



FALL OF **COMMUNISM**

Ali Jawad

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OF
COMMUNISM**

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Preface

Writing prefaces has been out of fashion for quite some time. Authors now feel free to churn out anything they like in the belief that the vast reading public will, in turn, do its duty to read what they have produced. With a million books to choose from, the public may be excused if it ignore a master piece and prefers one of those noisy bestsellers which serve delicious fare in the form of a compound of a thriller, pornography artfully concealed, and a stable background of imperishable status quo, plus a stylish narrative from. In fact in this age when every living creature has a bagful of rights, why can't a writer have the right to write and publish a book? What happens to it afterwards is another matter. It is a world ruled by chance; isn't it? Even the Big Bang occurred by chance. So, chances have to taken, it seems. Good and bad luck may be products of statistical permutations of unknown elements in the mysterious equations of invisible processes of that baffling thing called life.

So, then, why do I depart from the standard practice of the present day? To be honest, I myself don't know the answer. You do many things without having fool-proof reasons for doing them. Reasons may be hunted afterwards where necessary. For instance one would not know exactly why Hitler attacked Russia in the face of overwhelming contrary advice. Yet he did it and historians can produce dozens of plausible explanations for his fatal blunder.

Talking of the 'almighty' chance which is seen presumably to rule the universe, why not gossip about the vastly amazing event dear to every politically conscious individual

on this shaky planet ? Did this ‘event’ occur without rhyme and reason ? That would qualify it as a chance or accident. Only add the adjective ‘historical’ and you have a clue to the mystery. Or was it the work of vile sub-terranean agents who were more lucky than those in power ? Or, did the laws of dialectical materialism, so dear to Marx—the genius with a one track mind—happened to backfire and go in reverse gear ? Did the eternal laws of historical development go to sleep for a while ? Was the invincible pro-letariat too tired to react and save Lenin’s (in) famous legacy? Were the wicked capitalists concealed under the bed, ready to pounce when the historic moment arrived, visible only to themselves ? Is Russia’s fall mankind’s loss-irreparable loss, may be ? You may go on adding more and more questions if you are more curious than you ought to be. No doubt the collapse—it was a collapse rather than a fall—of the erstwhile Soviet Union and Empire was a staggering event and an extra-ordinary one in all of history. It will continue to be researched and documented and described and analysed and eulogised and cursed for as long as humankind has not run out of (intellectual) steam. Not all such questions can be seriously addressed at this time; but some non-philosophical ones can. And we have briefly considered some of the essential questions and discussed them as briefly as possible in this short essay. This is done in a spirit of full impartiality notwithstanding the passionate controversies and bitter venom which marxism aroused in its heyday. It may not be easy to forget and forgive but it is essential to be honest. That you can judge for yourself.

ALL JAWAD

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1

The Fall of the Soviet Empire

As the year 1989 ended and 1990 began, there occurred an event so momentous that even historians may not be able to assess its significance and consequences to the history of the world. It was the fall and disintegration of the Soviet empire, the greatest of existing empires without being so called. What stunned the world was the unexpectedness, and therefore suddenness, of the big event. Nobody seemed to have foreseen it. Politicians and economists, their next of kin, were blissfully unaware of the deeper currents inside the communist world of Europe. There were no striking symptoms of approaching disaster. No mass discontent presaging upheaval

or revolt was reported. Intellectuals, cynics and media, boisterous boys sat comfortably diagnosing and publicising the evils of the world. What is strange is the fact that not a shot was fired and no blood spilled to preserve the falling status quo. Marxist rulers, the very large communist parties and numberless Government bodies, including secret police organisations, were eliminated and folded up neatly without a word of dissent in their favour. A feeble and wavering attempt at staging a coup failed ignominiously and public condemnation of the same was unanimous. It seemed that communism as well as the state system which embodied it were rejected by the peoples of Russia and the rest of the communist world in Europe. China and a few other communist countries of the world temporised feebly and opened their doors to the new wind of change.

While the disintegration of the Soviet empire was unquestionable, it appeared to most people of the non-communist world that it also signified the rejection and 'fall' of communism as a philosophy adumbrated by Marx and Engels and enforced by Lenin in Russia. That conclusion may be correct though recent events raise some relevant issues which deserve notice. We may mention the same even though briefly for the sake of clarity. (It may be added that the writer is not an apologist or defender of the doctrines of Marx and others.)

I

Idealogical empires and states have been rather rare in the modern world. After World War II only four states were fully or partly ideologically based. These were the USSR, China, Israel and possibly Saudi Arabia. The USSR and China were founded on Marx's concept of what he had called 'scientific' socialism. In the view of many, this too was a kind of religion. Israel was created expressly as a Jewish state, though it had some features of a secular system. Among all the Muslim

states of the world, Saudi Arabia came nearest to being an approximate Islamic polity. Some would question this description. The last is the state and government of Iran, Russia and China represented one ideology and China is still trying to cling to the falling debris of its communist base. Israel and Arabia draw their inspiration from their religions in varying degrees.

When an ideological state fails and disintegrates, the question naturally arises whether this failure necessarily implies that the ideology or philosophic or religious system it embodied has also been disproved or refuted. The question is necessary because it is possible for a polity to fall without compromising the validity of its ideology. (In the case of religion, it is its belief system and operational system.) There have been conflicts of different religions in the past and sometimes one side won and sometimes another. The defeat of one side did not mean the refutation of its religion, whatever else it might mean. For example the rise of Islam led to the defeat and collapse of parts of the Roman Empire in the Middle East and northern Africa. It did not mean that Christianity, which was then the Roman Empire's official religion, was thereby disproved or its validity, such as it was, impaired. The same remark applies to the Muslim conquest of ancient India.

Can or must such a distinction be made in favour of Marxian communism now that communism has undeniably failed in the former Soviet empire ? In other words, was the communist doctrine sound intrinsically but its implementation was seriously defective ? Or were both the doctrine and the practical application of the same faulty ? Or, maybe the quality of leadership suffered a fatal decline and the top-men were too incompetent to handle critical situations. Other similar questions arise for intelligent consideration. We may

note that when such historic events happen, it is necessary to ask only the right questions which can help in understanding what's what.

II

Let us look into the questions that seem reasonable to ask, though their answers may not be easy to reach. Doubts about the communist theory may be laid aside for the moment as we consider more practical issues which have a direct bearing on the event and its why and wherefore.

(1) The first question is : Did Mikhail Gorbachev lose nerve when the challenge came from the three small Baltic states ? They opted for unconditional independence, a thing unheard of in the Red empire. Surely their leaders knew the price they could pay for their imprudence. The examples of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Rumania in the past decades were there to discourage over-ambition. Nor was the USA in a mood to take grave risks. The tenant of the White House knew the figures of the Soviet military might. The dangerous enigma that Russia had been was still a fact of history no democratic ruler would forget. In these apparently unpromising circumstances, why did Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia decide to test the Soviet will-power ? (It was not a case of testing Soviet military power, as it was a fact too well-known to be disregarded.)

It would be difficult to guess an answer to this question. On the risk they decided to take depended the fate of not only themselves but of power balance which despite its blatant injustice, was essential to peace in Europe.

In contrast, the behaviour of Chinese leaders in brutally crushing student agitation in Beijing's famous square is significant. Of course the Chinese were dealing with their own nationals while the Baltic states were not Soviet citizens.

But Soviet rulers in the past had not been influenced by such constitutional niceties. Nor did the West expect them to do so. There is a marked contrast of will in the two cases. Is there an obvious explanation for this ? We do not know enough facts yet to give an answer.

(2) There is no doubt that Mikhail Gorbachev was not a diehard communist of the stamp of his predecessors. This remark applies even more rigorously to Boris Yeltsin, the man who now is the most important personality in what is left of the late Soviet Union. The obvious question is : Did Gorbachev lose faith in Marx and his so-called 'scientific socialism' entirely ? Was he guilty of disbelief in the worth and validity of Lenin's handiwork ? Whether the loss of faith was complete or partial is at the moment immaterial. As he chose to give to the Soviet people the gift of 'glasnot' and 'perestroika' ; it follows that he was convinced that the political framework established by Lenin and extended by Stalin was in some important respects grossly untenable. He proceeded to provide remedies by cautious steps. By these two ill-fated words he decided to concede to his people the right of free speech and association as well as an 'open' government, meaning that the captive public could speak out its mind without fear of victimisation and also know what their government was doing in vital fields of policy including, presumably, diplomacy. These were vital deviations from Lenin's (and also Marx's) principles of statecraft. He was tampering with and dangerously undermining the foundation of the state structure. Freedom of speech to a half-starved and heavily deprived people would make them howl furiously about their condition and demand much more of food and basic consumer goods and essential amenities.

Now, the Soviet economy was still the old tightly controlled thing that it had been since the advent of communism. It

was in no position to meet the minimum demand of the people—after all they wanted only the barest minimum of what sustains life. The sense of grievance deepened. People could now debate if their whole philosophy of life was not seriously at fault. There was no overt case of sedition ; but the suspicion in all probability grew that they had been nose-led by erring and irresponsible men in pursuit of impracticable ideals wholly unrelated to the facts of life.

Now, when such doubts grow in men's minds, the cementing bond which binds men to the state is loosened. Doubt about the veracity of men and principles is more dangerous than ambiguous and sporadic violence. Such violence can be put down by the state if the army is loyal. It should be remembered that Soviet citizens were the world's most brain-washed people. They were also the most intensely protected from outside influences of every kind. When such people lose faith in their system, the consequences can only be disastrous in the long run. The outside world did not and could not know of such a change of sentiment. But the enthusiasm with which Gorbachev's reforms were received shows that the peoples' faith in their system was suddenly shaken.

Yet the question remains as to why the Soviet leader chose to reform the system by introducing potentially subversive elements in the body politic ? Perhaps more facts will become known later when an answer to such questions may be possible. History is still in the process of being made. We have not yet come to the end of the road.

(3) It is noteworthy that upto the end, Gorbachev kept on affirming his faith in communism. It may be due to the fact that his official position obliged him to do so. In a militarist state like the Soviet Union, he could hardly have done otherwise. But it should have been obvious to him that until the economy could improve greatly it could not produce the

essential goods of which the public had continuously been deprived ever since the socialist regime was established. The first priority should have been the reform of the economy. And the reform had to be radical and if the communist brand of economic system had failed—and more than half a century testified to this fact—then he should have had the moral courage to admit it openly or otherwise, and with the help of loyal colleagues, to frame the new policies to introduce a free market economy by cautious stages to avoid trouble. A market economy meant free enterprise, private profit, open competition and unregulated pricing. All this was a complete reversal of the communist dispensation. This was a stupendous task, possibly beyond the competence of one man. Considering the ethos of the Marxian regime with the lurking menace of a vast indoctrinated military force, it would be madness to embark on such a reversal without the utmost caution.

What we are suggesting is that the economy should have first been attended to. How this was to be done, given the chilling realities of Soviet system, is doubtless a question that outsiders cannot answer. It is all very well to offer comments *after* disaster has struck the land. But all historical writing and critical analysis cannot go beyond this. It seems plausible enough in the aftermath of the momentous events which befell the socialist empire and its ideological thesis.

(4) It may be noted in passing that a drastic supplanting of a system of life and governance and its replacement by another is an undertaking which few of the ablest men can hope to accomplish without grave dangers—mostly unknown—and the risk of failure. It is in such epoch-making situations that the mettle of men is tested. Not every situation may throw up the man of destiny to reshape the world. Despite his valuable insights, Gorbachev does not seem to be such a man.

He put political freedoms on the agenda, apparently sensing less danger of an uncontrollable upheaval. These could not cure the grave economic malaise which had enveloped the entire economy.

(5) What seems odd is the fact that Gorbachev, judging from his statements and doings, did not realise that the whole economic system had to be given up, as a mixture of partial market economy and partial regimented socialist economy was not workable. He was probably unwilling or unready to give up the communist system of production and distribution altogether, even by stages. Nor did he realise that, if the change was to come by instalments, it could not be useful if it was too slow. His concessions in the economy were too little, too timid and too leisurely. Anyone can read the newspaper reports of those fateful days and judge for himself the unprofitable sequence of events.

(6) We may remember that in the making and shaping of historic events, the influence of human personality is often decisive. The individual qualities of Lenin and Stalin had something to do with the shape of things as they unfolded during and after the revolution. This may sound like and unkind remark ; but we are convinced that in the hands of more pragmatic and decent personalities, the revolution may not have been as ruinously inhuman and shortsighted as it had been. Both these men were in a lot of hurry, totally oblivious of the all important human factor. Of course Lenin was far less bloodthirsty ; but he too was incapable of slowing down the speed of social change despite the terrible holocaust which was let loose, creating an immediate hell. Lenin's human qualities were meagre and there was no one to restrain him. He had become a virtual god to his followers. He was above criticism like Marx and like Stalin after him. As for Stalin, the world knows what sort of a creature he was.

The upshot of what we have said is that, in the hands of better men the Russian revolution might arguably have taken a different course and the resulting society and state might have been significantly different. If this hypothetical remark is plausible, it would follow that the communist doctrine would not have been exposed to the fate it has now met.

(7) Anyone who carefully reflects on the communist theory and its system will be struck by the extremely heavy burden it places on its votaries if they are to give practical shape to the theory. Not only the principal executors of the scheme are to attempt the highly problematic concepts but the population at large has to show extraordinary resourcefulness and angelic suffering for the Cause. Consider the immensity of the task which Marxists had to accomplish. Since times immemorial, there has been private property ; but now this ceases to exist. Through history men have been free to choose vocations in life. Carpenters, blacksmiths, shop keepers, butchers, farmers, clerks, masons, engineers, medicine men, teachers, clergymen, artisans, scholars and many others were free to engage in their professions. But the Marxian order had to do away with all this, as production and sale was to be the exclusive responsibility of the State. People had earned their own living and were no burden on the Government. Not so any more. They were to be employed by the Government which was to provide them with food, clothing and housing. All agricultural land owned by private citizens big and small, was cultivated to produce traditional crops and all that the State was interested it was in its revenue. But the communist state itself became the sole owner and landlord and made itself responsible for raising crops and feeding the huge population. This was a vital plank in the communist system. Consider the near impossible duty of seizing all lands and providing alternate arrangements at government expense. No wonder the

sheer size of the task of reconstructing the new socialist state proved beyond the ability of mortal men.

As if all this was not enough, the communist plan also included the duty of providing all adults with paid work. Every person had to be educated or made literate. To catch up with the West, this had to be done rather speedily. Also the country had to be led to develop capital goods industry so that the defence of the country could be made stronger. It was considered axiomatic that the capitalist enemy would not give them much breathing time, a surmise which was proved correct as early as 1941 (June 22).

It was not only the inexperienced government which had to do all this : the vast citizenry of the land had to share the national burden. If we add to this the fact that it was not a satisfied and happy public whose cooperation was needed, the bleak picture becomes more accurate. This then was the appalling situation which the rulers of the first socialist state in the world faced from the beginning.

As for the Soviet citizenry, there is the fact that the Russians were in many respects a far less gifted people than, for example, the Germans, the French and the British. In view of their differing histories, it was natural that their competence in fields of industry, administration, politics and organisation should not be a match to that of their capitalist rivals. National talents are doubtless unequal in many important respects. The three capitalist states named here also have qualities which make them unequal in certain discernable ways. For example the Germans are superior where discipline and obedience are needed. The French excel where imaginative works and artistic skill count. They err a bit too much on the side of idealism. Yet their history bears ugly marks of long periods of continental wars in their not so remote past. As for the British, they were far more practical, patriotic, unsen-

timental, hard headed and politically extra-ordinarily astute. They had a knack of turning luck to favour them under the most unfavourable circumstances. Easy going, they knew how to twist and bend circumstances without violence and bloodshed. They had a genius for compromise without losing sight of the basic objective. Had the marxian revolution occurred in any of these countries, is it probable that it would have succeeded without a civil war and the endless carnage and persecution which became its hallmark in Soviet Republics ?

This is a hypothetical question, and now, would seem profitless. Yes profitless, but not irrelevant. Because, if the answer to that question is in the affirmative, it would follow that the fatal defect lay in the leaders and the people and not in the communist doctrine.

The total debacle of the USSR gives rise to many odd questions. These are of no use to ordinary folk. One of these is what is stated above.

III

That the Soviet empire called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics has collapsed, disintegrated and vanished is now a fact of history. In August 1991 a half-hearted coup was attempted by a few men which failed ignominiously. Albeit for three days the fate of the Empire seemed to hang in the balance. From the facts it is now clear that the coup was not at all planned properly. No strategic locations were seized and securely held, a necessary precondition of all such risky ventures. Nor were most of the new prominent men in power seized and summarily done away with. While Gorbachev was whisked away and temporarily incarcerated, Boris Yeltsin remained free and he managed to break the silly attempted revolt. The army was not taken into confidence, nor was its help secured or at least its neutrality assured. The public was

everywhere strongly in favour of Gorbachev and his reforms. Glasnot and Perestroika were in high favour and the people had tested the intoxicating flavour of the new freedoms. Why should they be willing to reliquesh them in spite of half-empty stomachs for a bunch of stupid adventurers ? There were mass demo-nstrations against the coup. Inevitably the wretched coup failed completely. The world breathed freely again. The suspense was over.

Then the brief power struggle ensued between Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, as such a thing generally happens as a sad sequel to semi-idealistic adventures. Gorbachev wanted to salvage as much of the Soviet Empire as possible. He suggested a loose type of confederation, while Boris Yeltsin, speaking for a nationalist Russia, stood for complete independence for his republic. The torch of freedom lit by the Baltic states inspired other constituent republics to follow suit. Boris Yeltsin was in full command in Moscow and he was much more clear as to his objectives. He won and Gorbachev, the hesitating reformer, fled to America as the sole salvaged sacred relic of the vanished past.

From the extra-ordinary events which occured in the former USSR, at least three conclusions can be drawn. First, that the pull of nationalism proved stronger than the faith in the ideology of communism could evoke. In fact, the latter seemed to have been very fully repugnant to the masses once they were freed from the unceasing terror of the state. Second, that the staggering fall of the communist state logically meant that the operational principles on which that state was erected have been shown to be erroneous and a proved fallacy. Now private enterprise, property, profit, free market, competition and the rights of the individual as an individual seeking redress against state injustices, have been reinstated as respectable both in theory and practice. The steps in this direc-

tion have been cautious and careful, as they ought to be to avoid chaos. Third, what happened was indeed a true revolution engine-ered by and with total support of the people all over the enormous state. Yet few writers and commentators have had the honesty and sense to call it a 'revolution' which it undoubtedly is. This may be due to the fact that a bloodless revolution does not seem to qualify as a credible revolution.

Let us look into this matter a bit closely.

2

Of Revolutions-I

When the late Professor Harold Laski wrote his book 'Reflections on the Revolution of our Time' in 1941, the Second World War was still raging and the end was uncertain. Hitler had invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. The invasion had caused secret jubilation in Britain and the United States as the event gave promise of the certain defeat of Germany. But all over the free world, including embattled and empowered Britain and war-rich USA, there was overwhelming sympathy and admiration for the only socialist state in the world-communists, socialists, leftists, social democrats, radicals, liberals, intellectuals, fellow travellers, students, journalists, enslaved peoples of Afro-Asia,—all

were tremendously excited as it was supposed to be a war between capitalism on the one hand and communism on the other. Was the USSR not the fruit of the first successful political revolution in the world ?

It is well known that there was the much romanticised French revolution towards the end of the nineteenth century in western Europe. But it was a revolution that failed, and its credentials are less convincing. According to Marx, it was a bourgeois revolution and its failure was of no serious consequence. The Russian Revolution led to a duplicate revolution in war torn China. Later, following the trail blazed by Lenin, it is believed, there were lesser communist revolutions in eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America. Revolution seemed to be the order of the day. In the political and economic field, a revolution was tacitly assumed to be the only authentic event for intellectuals.

For sometime it seemed that gradually the world was slipping into the communist system. The three littoral states of the Baltic, viz Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, were occupied by the Soviet Union before it was invaded, and these were forcibly communised. When the German retreat began in 1943-45, the red armies occupied Rumania, Bulgaria, Poland and Czechoslovakia and established communist regimes there by military force. Albania too went the communist way, though Austria and Greece narrowly escaped that fate. Later the whole of South East Asia barring Malaya and Indonesia experienced the Chinese pressure and caved in, becoming Marxist-communist states. So did North Korea after a disastrous civil war, aggravated by American intervention. In the Middle East, there were drastic political changes in Syria, Iraq and North Yemen as a result of which bogus communist-like one party regimes were established. The same thing happened in parts of Africa, Libya, Algeria, Madagascar, Eritrea,

Ethopia, etc., embraced a type of so-cialism which was neither socialism nor communism, not to say liberal states. In South America there was a staunch ally of the USSR, Fidel Castro of Cuba, who made his country live on the charity of the Soviet Union. Castro did a lot of dirty and even dangerous things for the Soviet Union. No wonder the western world appeared to have run out of luck. Had the tide of history, as had been confidently predicted by Marx, turned decisively in favour of communism ? In the sixties and seventies, the prospects of world communism seemed distinctly bright. In particular, the populous Third World seemed destined to go communist sooner or later. Blatant Soviet propaganda loudly proclaimed the victory of the working class of the world which was part of historic evolution and wholly beyond human will.

Were all these changes 'revolutions' as affirmed by Marxists ? In the light of known facts, the answer to this question is an emphatic no. (Socialists and Marxists would obviously disagree.) And what are the relevant facts ? These are : (1) In the states of Eastern Europe, it was the Red Army which forcibly changed the existing politico-economic order into a communist system of the Russian type. The people of these states were not consulted at any stage. In fact they had no say in the matter. The Red Army units were established permanently in these unfortunate lands. Their presence was a guarantee that the new regime would not be overthrown by means of popular revolt. This guarantee was effective until the USSR itself collapsed both as a government and as an ideological system. (2) The Muslim states of Africa and the Middle East did not embrace the socialist doctrine except superficially. There was no serious industrialisation worth the name. Economic relations of production, on which communist theorists insist so much, remained substantially unchanged, as they were bound to be in tribal societies. Instead

of tribal chiefs, where they existed, there were now nominated bosses of the one Party which was in power as a result of so-called revolution. The only significant resemblance with the standard marxist state was this new order based on one-party state and government, buttressed by a totalitarian police state with its apparatus of espionage and unrelenting repression. As to economic production system and new class relations, there was almost nothing of the kind. Thus, the core of a communist reconstruction was missing altogether. For this reason we have called them 'bogus' socialist or communist states. (3) As to the remaining states of Asia, Africa and South America, there were communist agents of Russia who seized power due to highly disturbed and unstable conditions. Unpopular usurpers and incompetent dictators were easy to overthrow, and they were overthrown with the help of weapons and trained external agents called 'revolutionaries'. Inside the countries there was no popular support of these changes nor of their authors. These were simply acts of seizure by force and fraud. The masses were passive victims of self-styled leaders of revolutions who did what they liked in the name of the peoples.

I

This is a highly simplified account of what happened in certain countries in the post-World War II era. But it contains substantial elements of truth which are common to all of them. The important thing to note is that gross misgovernment and maladministration in these countries facilitated overthrow of their corrupt regimes and usurpation of authority by adventurers, including communists aided by Russia. There was no support of the masses of peoples anywhere, neither for the communists nor for the purely military dictators. Why was it so ? The answer is to be found in the facts of history, both of the colonial and pre-colonial period. Since those days, the character of the upper classes has continued to go down and

no talent for efficient and honest administration could develop. Foreign rulers, the Spaniards, the Dutch, the British, the French and the Belgians were responsible for making things worse as their sole interest was in making money by exploitation of resources of dependent territories and by trade which was mostly in their own favour. In terms of moral quality dependent countries suffered deterioration no less than in economic terms. Corruption, opportunism, incapacity to manage national affairs, selfishness, absence of accountability, vast illiteracy, political immaturity and inexperience of administrative skill—all these and much more helped to sap the moral fabric of decolonised nations. The pre-colonial pattern of military adventurism revived except in a few countries. Strong-men ethics emerged from army barracks along with army generals. Ancient traditions of tyranny now dressed in political jargon were re-established with the backing of one super-power or the other. These super-powers were absolutely indifferent to what was really in the interest of the native populations. Pompous verbiage supposed to deceive was deployed extensively as a cover-up for real good intentions. To this was added the newly awake-ned aspiration for economic development. Again the old masters were back on the scene with fresh para phernalia of aid and advice. These worthies were not worried at all by the despots on the throne as long as they could do business with them on their own terms. In communist type of despotisms, the USSR was satisfied with deceiving realities as long its agents and cronies could cling to secure footholds. Naturally the down-trodden peoples suffered despite independence. Neither army despots of the right nor the ideological communists spared the rod or the guillotine.

II

The case of China deserves some remarks as, like Russia, it also went through an indigenous 'revolution'. Though the

European Powers exploited and humiliated it as fully as they could in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they did not formally subjugate and colonise it. Hongkong was an exception as the British held it as its colony. Shanghai was the port where foreign powers indulged in open intrigues, treating it as an undefined international territory. In the thirties, Japan embarked on its expansionist policies. China was the only victim in Asia. It seized and occupied Manchuria and tried to develop it for its own benefit. Manchuria was rich in natural resources which were exploited by the Japanese, thereby laying the foundation of industrial infra-structure so essential to development. Not content with this, they deliberately provoked incidents in China in order to invade continental China, where they hoped to carve out an empire for themselves. An unequal war ensued in 1936 which was resisted by nationalist Chinese under Chiang Kai-shek and the communists under Mao Tse Tung. After the Japanese evacuated all foreign territories they had conquered, the inevitable civil war ensued in the heavily devastated land, in which the communists finally triumphed.

This victory was due largely to the support of the Chinese peasants. In Russia, the peasants were mostly the 'enemies' of the Revolution, whereas, in China they were its main support. Mao himself came of peasant stock. For him the peasants as a class were to be in the vanguard of the revolutionary which was to sweep over the whole country. Only the more well-to-do peasants were eliminated but not butchered wholesale. The rest were sucked in the general collectivisation of land which inevitably followed in the logical culmination of the new system.

This was a 'deviation' from the path taken by Russian communism; and it was the starting point of the sharp and continuing cleavage between the two giant communist

powers. This was doubtless aggravated by other serious differences between them. Stalin seems to have under-estimated the Chinese leaders Mao and Chou Enlai, who were no ordinary men. The Chinese leaders were not willing to introduce a carbon copy of Stalin's version of the communist doctrine. In their case communism had to bear the necessary imprint of Chinese culture, tradition and requirement. In this sense it was a Chinese brand of communism or marxism. What is more, the Chinese tried to retain old functionaries and some intellectuals of the old regime. Thus, despite a great many excesses, which seem inseparable from violent revolutions, the Chinese communists were noticeably less ferocious than their Russian mentors in killing and destroying the bourgeoisie class down to its lowest ranks. As it is, the prestige emotionally and intellectually associated with revolution as a historic event is believed to be enough to exonerate the leader of the new order of any wrong-doing.

While there is marked resemblance between some important features of the two major communist revolutions, there are also facts in which they are distinguishable. Some points of distinction are : (1) The Chinese revolution had wide support among the small peasantry which means it had some basis of popular support. No such claim is valid in view of stark facts of the Russian revolution. The latter was more in the nature of usurpation by trained cadres of professional politicians who were favoured by luck more than by the willing support of the much publicised proletariat. It was unfortunately an imposition from above by gifted and unscrupulous men for whom it was a chance of a life-time. (2) The Russian revolution depended entirely on the factory workers in whose name and for whose alleged benefit the Communist Party set up a dictatorship. The Chinese gave primacy to the farm workers which initially at least included the bulk of small peasants. (3) As a result, the Soviet Union

was cursed with a deficient and unpromising agriculture. In the case of China, this did not happen ; so its agricultural performance was not a lamentable drag on the state economy as a whole. (4) In restructuring and reshaping society the Russians wanted a totally clean slate, which meant killing a huge lot of people on purely doctrinaire and absolutely unwise and ruinous grounds. The long range effects of the same were disastrous in the extreme. The Chinese were more careful in getting rid of its people, though it had its share of unjustifiable blood letting. (5) Lenin and his associates felt unable to reinterpret, modify or simply discard Marx's theoretical pre-scriptions when faced with intractable reality. Lenin did bend in the event of a famine. His New Economic Policy, though a temporary measure, was a sensible compromise. After him Stalin, was far more rigid and fatally unimaginative, besides being inhuman. For them reality was to bend, not Marx's doctrine. The Chinese were less fanatical in such conditions. (6) The Russian rulers kept a marked distance from their people, observing an attitude of ruler versus ruled. The Chinese were much closer to their people.

III

Communists generally believe that the success of the marxists in the civil wars in Russia and China are proof that the communist doctrine was vindicated as a valid proposition. The same inference is drawn from Russia's triumph over Germany in World War II. Many ordinary people are apt to be mislaid by this sort of logic. Any one who cares to reflect on these facts of history will have no difficulty in dismissing them as absurd. For, when two well armed Powers clash on the battle field, success depends on a variety of factors which have nothing to do with the merits or demerits of a certain ideology. As in all wars, superior strategy, better weapons and better trained and disciplined troops, competent generalship,

and luck often determine which side is to win. This also applies to civil wars which are more destructive. The mere fact that there are two sides fighting shows that the ideology of neither is uncontestedly acceptable.

In the case of the Russian civil war, the balance of advantage was from the beginning in favour of the Bolsheviks. First, their enemy was a divided force. There were two factions fighting the revolutionaries : the so-called constitutional government headed by the social democrat Kerensky. He was by profession a lawyer and by nature an irresolute man. The other group was led by an ex-army General Kornilov, who hated Kerensky as much as he hated the Bolsheviks. He had no understanding of the vast surge of public feeling against the Czarist tyranny. Then there was the third group led by another foolish Ex-General Deniken who was supporting the White Russians. This man was able to antagonise the Whites by his out-dated attitude. The Government forces were thus, unable to devise and implement a coordinated policy so essential to final success.

Secondly, the Social Democrats had poor support in the key regions of Moscow, St.Petersburg and Petrgrad (later named Leningrad). Their strongholds were to the east and part of the south. Politically these were not vital to success when even there the peasants were alienated by the army commanders. He who held Moscow held the key to Russia. This was in the tight grip of the Bolsheviks.

Thirdly, the Bolsheviks allowed the impoerished peasants to seize the estates of the well-to-do landlords (Kulaks). There was a famine and the poor peasants in the summer of 1918 were desperate. The Government also responded to the situation in the same manner, but their gesture was tardy and unpublicised. The poor peasants swung

to Bolshevik side. It will be true to say that in the civil war, the peasant support enabled the Bolsheviks to win. Very soon the peasants learnt the bitter truth that the Bolsheviks were their worst enemies.

Finally, it must be added that the Government party had no catchy slogan to attract the people. The Bolsheviks had many like “all power to the workers.” Also the remnants of the defeated Russian army in the countryside were with the anti-Bolsheviks. And they were no match to the newly recruited militias trained and inspired by the able marxist Leon Trotsky, another Jew in the revolutionary vanguard.

It remains to add that the Cheka, the Russian secret police, was reformed by the Bolsheviks in order to prevent desertions from the army and to stop internal subversion. It was as ruthless as one could imagine, and therefore successful.

It is easy to see that none of these factors are a consequence of the Bolshevik—later called communist or marxist—ideology. In fact such combinations of circumstances are entirely a form of strategy, both military and political. War conditions warrant extraordinary devices and tactics, and he wins who excels in the same.

In the Second World War (1939-45), Germany had superior military power and won great battles but eventually lost the war. Hitler had invaded Soviet Russia (June 22, 1941) and the German armies were welcomed by the Russian populations who looked upon them as their liberators from the detested communist-marxist regime. This shows that the people had not been won over to the communist system which failed to provide them with basic necessities of life. Instead, it subjected them to the most barbarous and inhuman treatment.

Why did the Soviets win the Russo-German war ? Because, the German occupation authorities treated the Russian populations with the most savage cruelty designed to reduce their numbers substantially. No wonder the poor people were driven to support their own government when the choice lay between the cruelty of their own rulers and the worse cruelty of the insolent foreign conqueror. This was a vital factor in favour of the Soviets. Secondly, the German army faced too heavy centralised control and direction from Hitler in the conduct of the war, thereby leaving no serious scope to the field commanders who needed but were denied flexibility and freedom of initiative. That was not the way to win wars. One obvious example was the fall of Stalingrad in early 1943 with the capture of a German army of three and a half lacs of men armed to the teeth, who were not permitted by Hitler to fire a shot until too late while other army units had to fight against super-human resistance which crushed them into defeat. Hitler's megalomania was thus to cost him the loss of the war he had want only started against the unanimous advice of all his military Generals and all his Ministers, a rare phenomenon in a fascist state. Had the army Generals been given freedom to operate as they thought fit, Russia would have been defeated, or its armies destroyed, before the supply of American weapons became a vital factor in their favour.

Lastly, Japan's insane attack on Pearl Harbour, unleashing a war with the United States brought that country directly into the world war. Prior to this, the USA was giving help to the Allies with an eye to its own advantage and interest. The fate of both Japan and Germany was, thus, sealed. Britain's lonely and unequal struggle against Germany was no longer likely to peter out. Why the Japanese behaved as they did, need not detain us here. Even the ablest men commit blunders from the best of motives. It is here that the limits of human

wisdom and capacity and resource are convincingly revealed, though men fail to admit the fact.

The Second World War ended in Russia's favour due to external causes which had nothing to do with the merits of socialism or communism (marxism.)

IV

We have briefly outlined the main features of the Chinese revolution already. From this it should be easy to infer why the communists succeeded against the legitimate government of General Chiang-Ke Shaik in the civil war which followed the defeat of and surrender by the Japanese in August 1945. The Russians seized Manchuria and were in a hurry to vacate. In Manchuria and elsewhere the Japanese left huge quantities of arms and ammunition and the Russians surreptitiously helped the Chinese communists to get the same as much as was possible. The USSR had already recognised the Kuomin-tang—the Chinese Nationalists—as the legitimate government of China. The USA had sent General George Marshall to help the two factions of China to reach agreement. But neither side was sincere and failed to cooperate with Marshall. The Gen-eral had advised Chiang that he should not provoke a war with the communists who were militarily stronger and much better organised. But Chiang-ke Shaik did not heed this advice, and he believed that Mao Tse Tung, even if he shared power with him, would try to oust him and hand over the country to his party for exclusive rule.

The principal point of disagreement arose on the question of basic constitutional and economic reforms, which the communists wanted to be immediately enforced *before* they joined the government. On the other hand, Chiang wanted them to join first and let the government settle the question of reforms later. He believed that the communists did not

mean business and would prove treacherous. Thus, a workable agreement was ruled out from the beginning.

The communists had developed trained cadres from their experience of the war against Japan. Chiang had few trained civilians to take over the administration after the Japanese surrender. Besides, the communists had greater support in the countryside which turned the balance eventually in their favour. Another important factor was also favoured them greatly: Chiang enjoyed the support of the corrupt and oppressive and infamous landlords. Mao's support came from the peasants. In fact Mao replaced the marxian factory worker as the standard bearer of revolution by the peasant of the country side. This was a deviation from Marx's sacred orthodoxy, but it worked wonderfully in an unindustrialised country. In this lay Mao's superiority over Stalin, if not Lenin.

The landlords, often called war-lords, were a disunited body. They were a decadent section of society and were justly hated by the people at large, especially by the peasants. Chiang's army officers were venal and corrupt no less than the war lords. The Americans gave generous help to the nationalist Chinese but Chiang's army was incapable of utilising the same properly. Corruption reached even Chiang's household. Most of the goods and supplies were squandered away by this bunch of rogues. No wonder they were destined to be defeated.

There is nothing in these facts to prove that the communists' victory owed anything to the influence or effect of the communist doctrine. It was due to the logic of the existing situation.

V

Anyone writing about political revolutions of modern history is bound to mention the French Revolution (1889-).

1899) which was the revolution *par excellence*. It was a revolution of the middle classes, especially the upper middle classes, against the power and privileges and exactions and tyranny of the land owning gentry. With this gentry was allied, by a community of interest, the Roman Catholic Church which owned roughly one fourth of the land and its produce. The Church was not directly in the firing line; but as an oppressive class, it was perceived as part of the 'enemy'.

It was a spontaneous uprising of large sections of people all over France in which, in 1789, conditions of great distress prevailed. No party of professional and ideologically inspired revolutionaries was lying in wait for a chance to profit from wide-spread disorder and discontent. Unlike communism, it was not an attempt to impose an abstract theoretical framework to create a new civilisation after destroying the existing one. On the contrary, living conditions forced the (upper) middle classes to seek radical reforms in the existing order to make it more humane, equitable, and satisfying. What was sought was redress of wrongs which hurt dreadfully on the *existing* foundation of property and reduced inequality.

The course followed by this revolution was historically natural in the sense that events evolved out of events as the same developed as responses or reactions to the deeds and misdeeds of men representing different interests. There were no dictators in a pre-determined hierarchy of leadership. On the contrary, it was an assembly—consisting of about seven hundred and fifty Deputies chosen from all over the country by different vocations which met and debated and argued and disputed and decided and counterdecided from time to time. No one individual, apart from his natural ability and talent was solely in charge of anything that was to be stage-managed. A large body thus acting operated in the full light of day. There were numberless magazines that all sorts of

journalists published in Paris and other towns. They had very limited circulation, and hence their influence was negligible. But human curiosity was thus satisfied at different levels of understanding and interests.

As mentioned above, the Revolution was a contest for supremacy between a highly privileged class and an equally highly disadvantaged group which was growing in numbers and importance especially in towns and cities. Infact feudalism was facing an unforeseen challenge to its time honoured position in French society. This class consisted of merchants, shopkeepers, manufacturers, bankers, brokers, lawyers, doctors, scientists, teachers, professors, artists, authors, journalists, women of fashion and the like. Together they were the bourgeoisie, a term which in that age was not a word of contempt or condemnation.

Below them those who were called the 'people', the proletariat. They included labourers, masons, bricklayers, carpenters, bakers, barbers, pedlers, innkeepers, small shopkeepers, butchers, cleaners, blacksmiths, tailors, weavers, millers, saddlers, tanners, cutlers, turners, cooks, servants, prostitutes, pimps, thieves, etc. It was not their revolution, and so they were not actively involved. As there were no factories and mills, there were no workers so dear to the heart of Karl Marx in the next century. That the change in social relationships would give them some fringe benefits may have been the hope of many of them.

Why did the farmers revolt against their landlords ? Because, the latter demanded a fixed number of days of free work from them and this was an old convention, not the law. The tenants had to repair the private roads of the land-owners. They also had to work on his farms and orchards free of payment. If a tenant sold his tenancy to another, he had to pay 15 percent of the price to the landowner. Such so-called

privileges were resented. The age had come when the same would be resisted by force.

What exactly were the conditions which caused the revolt? The fact is that in 1788 there was a severe drought followed by a devastating hailstorm affecting 180 miles of land. Then came disastrous floods and the severest winter in eighty years. The result was obvious : In summer there was famine all over the country. Crops, cattle, houses, livestock, poultry, grain stored in villages were all destroyed. People became paupers overnight. Leaving their ruined hearths and homes, they trekked to towns, looting stores on the way and spreading panic and anger. In cities and towns they wandered without adequate help and chance of rehabilitation. Of course nobody was to blame, least of all the King and his nobles. Inevitably there were food shortages and riots. In those days the means of moving goods from one place to another were poor. Nor was there any stock of saved food grains to spare for the suffering people. Widespread unemployment was made worse by the dumping of cheap finished goods from England where the rising tide of new manufactures was producing unprecedented prosperity. The numbers of the unemployed kept on rising, local production falling all the time. Unsold French goods in France made townsfolk bitter without the means of immediate relief.

In these conditions the French peasantry in March 1789 refused to pay taxes. The country stood at the edge of bankruptcy. This was the background of this revolution which failed too quickly from the excesses and counter excesses it generated in less than a decade of vast tragedy and turbulence. It must be remembered that the people in towns and villages were loyal to the King.

As the principal actor in this strange drama what was the conduct of the King ? Louis Sixteenth was a good man, kind,

forgiving sympathetic to the poor and the lowly, a loving husband and father and one without the vices common among the royalty of the age. As a King, he was neither wise nor strong. He lacked the will to rule and depended on the advice of his wife, Queen Marie Antoinette who was an Austrian princess. He could not correctly judge when and to what extent to be resolute. Nor could he sense danger ahead of the critical time. He was alone among the continental monarchs, in seeking to govern with the advice and cooperation of his subjects. Yet he failed to see that he was creating a body which was likely to dilute, even eliminate, his absolute authority which till then had remained practically unquestioned. There were kings ruling the continent much as they had done in bygone ages. He also upheld his right to rule as he saw fit. His Minister in charge of finance (Necker) advised him to consult chosen representatives of the people to ascertain the grievances of his subjects from time to time and the fatal idea struck him as immensely desirable. Nobles of the realm strongly urged him not to do so. But he decided to take the risk, thereby undoing his own position. He also sacked Necker who was a popular minister but had to recall him. He forbade firing on the crowd by his palace when it stormed into it. That was a fatal blunder. Earlier he secured troops from outside the country for his help but failed to give them orders. He was indecisive, weak, and inopportunely compassionate. He was not fitted to master a dangerous crisis, much less to prevent it. Like Hamlet he was fated to face a challenge he was not qualified to meet and resolve. He had weak judgement, which, for men in his station, was certain to be fatal in special circumstances, as it did. And fate deserted him at the most critical hours in his life. Even his cousin, the Duc Phillippe de Orleans joined the Assembly and voted for his execution, no doubt from selfish motives. Nor did he care to escape from Paris to either a safe province in his country or to another country, until it was too late.

Among the prominent personalities of the revolution were Robespierre (late guillotined), Condercet, theorist, philosopher, and an inconsistent politician (executed), Diderot, an intellectual and not a convincing character (poisoned), Jean Paul Marat, an exceedingly fanatical journalist and a short-sighted but staunch proletariat politician (killed by a lady), Talleyrand, General Lafayette (escaped), Mirabeau, who lived on 18 francs a day, (died March 1791), Neckler (escaped), Lavousier, the scientist (guillotined) George Danton, D'Alembert, Buzot and others, too many to be mentioned here. These men behaved as angry and passionate men do in circumstances largely of their own making but beyond their control.

They may have dreamt of heroic times and historic deeds; but they did enact a faltering revolution leading straight to a historically romantic dictatorship under Napoleon whose name casts a romantic spell even now on men otherwise sensible.

It remains to add that the course which the Revolution followed resulted in the execution of an inexcusably large number of people most of whom were innocent. Then a sudden reaction set in and the leaders of the first phase were vigorously accused of treason or something akin to it. Other adventurers climbed to power and started executing their predecessors. It must be noted that what happened was not a counter-revolution but a difference as to the validity of a certain policy. The situation became chaotic and got out of hand. Naturally the strong man from outside the revolutionaries had a chance to seize power and to set things right. The Revolution had failed in its immediate objectives. Yet it left its indelible marks on the minds and beliefs and aspirations of men which in course of time radiated to cover the whole western world and set a seal on the primacy of social change through organised violence.

VI

This century has seen another revolution in the unlikliest of all places—Iran. The world of traditional societies has not seen bloody upsettings in pursuit of secular purposes. Violence, killing, repression, summary executions, blood feuds, brutal torturing and vengeance have been conspicuous in their histories. Revolts by ambitious rebels wanting thrones there have been too numerous to remember. Personal ambition and dynastic gain have been the causes of most of bloody warfare and insane strife in the ancient and the modern world down to the last century. Even now army Generals and their henchmen seize power unlawfully wherever instability prevails in the so-called Third World. These usurpers give themselves fancy names to conceal their crimes.

But social change which could truly uplift the poor and illiterate masses has not been the object of organised rebellion except rarely and unsuccessfully. There are reasons for this unflattering omission, but this is outside the scope of our consideration. The rebellion in Iran against the ruler of the country and the political order he symbolised was doubtless a genuine and spontaneous revolution. The Shah of Iran and his predecessors had long deprived the religious leaders of their legitimate share in the management of the country's affairs. Iranian people held their men of religion—the elites—in high esteem. Rightly or wrongly the clergy was venerated as a persecuted group who ought to have been given a dominant share in framing and executing policy. The Shah was seen as a stooge of the Americans, serving their interests while talking of making Iran a mini-super Power. He poured billions of dollars into United States' coffers in order to modernise Iran, its economy and armed forces. In a country loving orthodox ways of living, he encouraged fashion and follies suited to the rich folk of New York and Paris. An upper

class emerged which was corrupt, unscrupulous and spineless. Too many Americans found jobs in Iran on fantastic salaries and allowances, most of whom were known to be worthless. Naturally the United States came to be seen as the exploiting enemy.

The Shah of Iran established a police state which resorted to secret terror and kidnappings and executions. Not a word of this could be leaked out or publicised for fear of savage reprisals. Emboldened by the apparent success of his system, the Shah laid hands on the most respected of the clergy. Khomeini, the most venerated of them had long been exiled and two of his sons murdered. Power certainly corrupted the Shah to a degree which made reform and rectification impossible. He wholly misjudged the temper of his people. His American advisers, despite their boasted efficiency, were no less blind to reality. His cynically farcical celebrations of his reign, linking it to a very ancient king, costing an enormous sum (about two billion dollars perhaps) was an event which led to his undoing.

We need not mention the events of the spontaneous uprising of the people. It is too recent an event to be forgotten. The point to emphasise is that it was a classic case of a revolution par excellence, far more authentic than the Russian Revolution. Here there was no preplanned scheme of conspiratorial insurrection ; nor was there any external ideology which inspired it. It was a revolution because it changed the fundamental basis of power relations in Iran. The change was far more political than economic. (For that reason the communists may dispute its claim to be a revolution at all.) The world, however, regarded it as a revolution and nothing less doubt it was also followed by trials and hangings which tarnished its image. But all revolutions, except spiritual ones, are bound to deal with known and potential enemies, within

and without, and in line with events the treatment is bound to be punitive more than forgiving. This is not to gloss over wrongs done and reprisals perpetrated. None-the-less it was a revolution to instal Shia Islam in place of Shah's detested corrupt and infamous secularism.

3

Of Revolutions-II

These are cases of political revolutions, and they had pronounced economic causes and consequences as well. Of this type of violent and bloody change affecting and altering the whole existing social structure, fortunately there have not been too many examples in known history. They seem to have acquired special significance from the parliamentary war against the King in England in the sixteenth century and the climate of surging turbulence in Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century, ideas and aspirations of glorious revolutions continued to excite and inspire people all along, Marx had declared that workers' dictatorships were bound to

be established all over the industrialised world through violent revolutions in which communists were to play decisive leading roles. Marx left behind a legacy of thought which had a profound effect on the minds of the intellectual class in the western world. Only now that Lenin's work in Russia has been blown to bits by a very different and far more convincing type of revolution, can it be said that this influence has been appreciably weakened.

From the brief description of revolutions we have given some useful inferences can be drawn to serve as possible identifying marks of political and economic revolutions in general :

(1) General political conditions in a country qualifying for revolutionary change must be chaotic and incapable of peaceful reform at the hands of rulers and their advisers. Through circumstances which nobody in power could have altered, people, especially those in lower ranks, are rapidly impoverished. Production of commodities goods and grains falls steeply. Food shortages occur while unscrupulous folk make money by hoarding and black-marketing. Officials see this but are either unable or unwilling to suppress these activities. People too see this and conclude that there is collusion between them. Actual or artificial famine stalks the land. The people lose patience and are ready to believe the worst against rulers. And nobody from the rulers cares to reach the people in their distress and express sympathy and promise redress. Alienated through no fault of theirs, the afflicted masses in towns and villages listen to agitators and believe them when they fulminate against authority. Those at top levels of Government are blissfully unaware of the damage which is being done both to state and society. It is the characteristic weakness of all irresponsible authority that its intelligence service fails to warn it of the gathering storm or

is too timid to give the unpleasant warning or, worse still, does not know about the danger and probable disaster. Whatever may be the cause, the top men fail to do the needful in time and, when they do, the hour of acceptance is gone. Now the ruler and the ruled are arrayed against each other without knowing the fact. In that lies the tragedy of unimaginative authority and misguided and deluded man.

(2) A stage has now been reached when, in the absence of conciliatory measures on either side, they will soon reach a point of no return. This is the critical turning point in the history of an impending revolution. But, it is all too easy for learned historians, writing long after the event, to talk of 'critical' moments ; but to the actors in this tragic drama, the said moment is all but invisible. They are too deeply involved to notice moments charged with grave consequences. Except for superlatively gifted men, the moments come and go, merging in the forgotten details of ugly episodes some of which are afterwards selectively designated as glorious, shameful historic, infamous, great and petty, depending on which side the writer chooses to praise or condemn.

So much for 'critical' moments. However, at this stage agitators, leaders, demagogues, opportunists, gangsters, rogues and ruffians come out in hordes, inflaming mobs, telling to kill and destroy as everything belongs to them. Government officials and the police are nervous, and cannot retaliate effectively. A weak resort to force only exposes their weakness. High authority far away does not know what is going on except in their neighbourhood. Outlying areas are thus cut off or left undefended. And the authority calls out the army without giving it a free hand. The army is demoralised or divided in loyalty. Soon it gets dispirited and sooner than was feared, the game is lost. The rulers find themselves illogically defeated and bundled out. Earlier they made con-

cessions the revolutionaries would not touch, nor would they talk except with the gun : partly betrayed, partly victims of dire incompetence and disunity. But for their handling of events, they could have won. At heart the majority of men were loyal but this availed them nothing. They are swept off into the dustbin of history, unmourned, unsung, but plentifully cursed by the victors.

(3) Whichever side wins, it treats the fallen foes with needless barbarity. A mock trial is possible, though it is a cruel joke. They go before the firing squad or face the guillotine.

(4) During the revolution, it is the innocent citizens who suffer most without a chance of redress. Even after the Revolution, this class of folk are exposed to new terrors, as their decency and silent patriotism are wilfully misrepresented as hostility to the new order.

(5) The leaders of the Revolution, rich in overconfidence and an abundance of exuberance, lack the ability to reconstruct state and society without experimental blunders and thereby subjecting the populace to new and unprecedented hardships. They kill too many people out of idealogical zeal—a blood stained tribute to the new faith.

(6) The new rulers do things in a mighty hurry, blundering more than was excusable. Victory makes them wisdom-proof. They alone know best. Arrogance instead of humility causes them to lose cooperation of the uncommitted, whom they scorn as ignorant fools.

(7) As such revolutions are soaked in force and fraud, they fail to win over the genuine acceptance of the new creed and the new system by the generality of the people. Only free and willing acceptance can last and endure. Of this not a vestige is to be found in post-revolutions, dispensation. Not that it seems to matter to them. Armed with brute force and totally irresponsible power, they spurn consent and concurrence of ,

the governed as the most irrelevant thing. Abuse of power by erstwhile rulers they hated and resisted, and absolute abuse of power they adopted as the most effective principle of governance. No wonder they fail to strike roots in the hearts and minds of their people—the ultimate arbiters of the New Order.

(8) If living conditions in the new system were markedly better and did not exact too heavy a price, the people would come to tolerate and finally embrace the same. But this does not happen, the new rulers are too sure of the efficiency of power and their new devices based on it to worry about such remote and improbable contingencies.

(9) Post-revolution politics of the new rulers may lead to schism and serious disagreements with disastrous consequences, as happened in the French and the Russian revolutions.

I

Political revolutions recorded in history, resulting in bloodshed and great destruction, are not the only revolutions experienced by man. In fact, in his long march in pre-history, from savagery to settled living, mankind has enacted many entirely pacific revolutions by means of truly beneficial adaptations and inventions. In anthropological terms, consider the formation of families. This was a giant step towards inevitable progress. Cultural evolution began from this stage. Then, probably not long afterwards, groups and tribes were formed living nearer to pastures and ponds and fertile land. These were revolutions of a kind not repeated very much in the sunlit epochs of history, recorded or otherwise. Man's destructive propensity—scientists deny that men have instincts—demanded organised expression and war was invented as a characteristic human activity. This too was a revolution which has plagued mankind to this day, perhaps the most enduring of our social inventions (revolutions). The invention of fire,

whenever it may have occurred, was undeniably a revolutionary achievement. From living as nomads in the earlier stages the transition to settled living was another remarkable step far more significant than any of our boasted historic revolutions. (As it is, to this day mankind has not succeeded in coalescing into regional communities peacefully to make collective management of world affairs according to principles of equity possible). In due course came agriculture to which we owe all our cultural and spiritual advances. Civilisation became a distinct possibility. From subsistence economy to an economy of abundance—the basis of urban civilisation—was now attainable. Then came irrigation and slavery—detested by us but essential to progress in those times—and cities appeared as more a sophisticated expression of collective living in differentiable vocational sub-groups. This phenomenon must have occurred independently in different human habitations, but it marks a clear tendency toward a more satisfying mode of living. Perhaps 'revolution' is too weak a word for most of these now long forgotten achievements of primitive man.

Among other revolutionary inventions and innovations was the extraction of ores and their refinement and conversion into metals. As man never forgot to utilise new things and new knowledge for war purposes, it may be noted that the benefits of the new inventions were partly offset by man's misapplication of the same to purposes of destruction. The invention was a gain, its misuse was loss. Here the moral factor is intruded because man chose to do the wrong thing which he was under no compulsion to do. The invention and use of the wheel, perhaps much earlier, was also a most beneficial event.

The appearance of religions in different epochs of remote and verifiable history constitutes a wholly different type of

experience which transcends the boundaries of material and intellectual category of knowledge. It is not easy in this age of agnosticism to say much in favour of religion. Yet religion has played a vital part in the lives of men over all periods of known and unknown history. Perhaps it is true, though unfashionable, to say that man was never without religion, or what passed for religion. It was man who perverted religion and put it to baser uses. That fatal tendency has persisted down to our own times and hostile critics have condemned religion as mischievous and not man, its incompetent and often perverse practitioner.

Consider Islam, the latest of great religions. (It has too many enemies everywhere.) Its Prophet brought about a real and convincing revolution in the history of mankind. What was his secret for doing it ? His approach, like that of all prophets—prophets and not charlatans in prophets' robes—was to cleanse the minds of his followers and change their mentalities so completely that they would follow the new doctrine in letter and spirit under all circumstances. This was his revolution and it worked wonderfully. The astonishing speed with which the new faith spread and the extent of territories it conquered spiritually more than militarily has been acknowledged by all fair minded historians and scholars. Its revolution lay in the minds and behaviour of men. As long as this remained the formula, successes continued. When it was forgotten and empire building became the norm, the rot set in, though the decline and debacle covered a long span of (historic) time. That formula was ex'poused in a different context by India's great leader, Mahatma Gandhi, who wanted men to change their own mentalities before initiating great changes. That his people did not care to follow his prescription even minimally does not detract from its value as well as its relevance. He was great because of this perception and greater still in his death. (As to his politics, even he climbed

down from the ideal to the narrowly political, perhaps due to pressure of friends and colleagues. They were different men.)

The invention of gunpowder ushers in the modern age and, according to the late Professor Toynbee, emperor Barbar was history's agent for doing so. This was a revolution in the socio-military history of mankind. Some centuries later came another significant but locally little noticed change, the advent of sea power. Less a blessing and more a misfortune, it created the modern imperialism of Europe resulting in the undoing and vicious enslavement of races and communities in three continents. A revolution certainly but a malignant one, judging by results.

The industrial revolution started in Britain towards the end of the eighteenth century, spreading to western Europe and United States and later on to Japan. It has changed man and his society more completely and rapidly than anything else. All the effects it has produced have not been good as they could not have been. Most of the means and methods of production of goods and commodities and consequent changes in life—transportation, food, new urban flats, liberal thinking, elimination of epidemics, new medicine, new war, newspapers, radio, television, new home amenities, etc. have radically changed men themselves. The momentum of change has not slackened anywhere yet. More and more short models of new sub-revolutions go on assaulting us day in and day out ; and yet western man's thirst for ever newer and newer things and conditions remains unsatisfied.

The industrial revolution is a classic example of an entirely peaceful revolution and it has had more enduring ability than the blood soaked political revolutions of history.

II

Anyone who reflects on violent political revolutions is certain to conclude that the same have not been an unmixed

blessing. It is easy to see why this has been so. The main reason is that violence itself generates a climate of a great deal of injustice even though the motives of their authors may have been begin. Violence is a denial of the necessity of seeking free consent. Thus, both freedom and the right of choice or consent are thereby annulled. That this is done only as a temporary measure, or from compelling circumstances, may be urged in mitigation of the evil of violence, but they alter the basic nature of violence itself. Consequently, despite good intentions, evil has produced results not wholly good. And anything which entails evil, even if partially, is certain to produce not what is wholesome or lasting.

Violence is let loose by revolutionaries in pursuit of ideal aspirations. But those who have the monopoly of power derived from violence, are always a tiny minority imposing their will on a far greater majority. The will, opinion, consent, and acceptance of this majority are fully disregarded, perhaps because the leaders of the revolution are not in favour of these refinements. To them these are idle luxuries : impediments and obstacles calculated to halt and hinder the course of the Revolution they are heralding. These considerations will imperil the Revolution itself. For them there is no such thing as a revolution based on the free consent of the people at large. It is a contradiction in terms.

Once revolutionary violence spreads all over a country or region, it has a tendency to get out of hand. All sorts of people take to the streets and revel in killing, looting and destroying whatever they can lay hands on. Quite a lot of riff-raffs join the agitators and commit shameful crimes against defenceless and innocent people. Rogues and ruffians have a field day. They do their worst and are given credit for brave deeds. Leaders of the Revolution are helpless, as they have no means of stopping the rascals. Thus, evil deeds are committed and

if the same exceed limits, the revolutionary enterprise comes close to failure or getting seriously skewed.

It is sometimes said that planned revolution is something like a surgical operation and the pain and penalisation it inflicts are the price one must pay for the final good it brings. The analogy is false ; because, a surgical operation is fully under the control of experts who have performed it many times before. Secondly, all precautionary measures are in hand lest anything should go wrong. Nothing of the sort is possible in a revolution. If it goes wrong, nothing corrective steps can be taken. The revolution, being a big unlimited affair, cannot even be called off. Consider the waywardness and uncontrollability of the French Revolution and the consequences they had not bargained for.

Revolutions nurtured in violence do not change minds and mentalities. In fact they cannot. When freedom to accept or reject is taken away, how can there be honest, and, therefore, enduring, change of mind or belief ? This kind of change cannot be rammed through by force. Accepted and lasting opinions can only be free. Post-violence conversion is illusory, as happened in Soviet Russia. Seven decades of history's most repressive and cruel regime failed to convert the Soviet masses to marxism (communism.) That is one fundamental cause of the failure not only of the Soviet empire but also of Soviet communism.

In the world of today however, no alternative to violent revolution would seem feasible. This is because violence has seeped too deeply into the hearts and minds of men. This is an age given over to the religion of materialism and materialism cannot look unkindly on violence as an instrument of social and political change. In addition, materialism tacitly assumes that as long as aims are good, violent methods are permissible. Only spiritual doctrines insist on both aims

and methods being ‘good’, viz free of violence except in self-defence or in minimum degree. This world does not accept this type of limitation. The French Revolution failed due to this, while it was still unfolding itself. The Russian Revolution succeeded initially, only to create an untenable state and society.

This is a large topic but it is beyond the scope of this little essay.

4

The Spirit of the Age

In their own times Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill wrote very ably on the subject mentioned above. Those were times when the old order was dying and a new one was being born in western Europe. The machine age founded in industrialism was slowly unfolding itself, killing feudalism and the dominant bourgeoisie culture. Winds of change were sweeping over half the continent, shaking empires and uprooting ancient traditions. Both these brilliant men saw the change and discerned its hidden contours.

In our times Professor Harold Laski also wrote on the same subject, but his perspicacity and vision were blurred as he was a committed man—an intellectual communist with a British liberal background. He wrote merely what was history as seen from his own angle, and, thus, far less illuminating. The late Professor, despite his intellectual talent, could not imagine that his beloved USSR, being founded on force, would not last indefinitely and it might perish of its own structure of tyranny. Nor did Laski note that dictatorship whether of one or many does not escape the fate of absolute and irresponsible authority.

The age in which we live has seen many significant changes of every description. Not only in politics has it been conspicuous giving the masses a taste of incomplete democracy but also of capitalism's ugly face called fascism and state capitalism called socialism. In the field of knowledge there has been an explosion unprecedented in history. The growth of science and technology has simply been phenomenal. Organised industry has made life far more comfortable in material terms. Its products can be seen in the darkest portions of dark Africa. Education, literacy, health, communication, amusement and housing have all benefited vastly in the new age. The western man has been enjoying freedoms which only a hundred and fifty years ago were almost unthinkable. From instant pleasures of sensation to the ever expanding list of universal human rights, there is nothing which is not available at command. And continuous change, extending horizons and making man feel that he was master of his own fate—an erroneous notion has been the order of the day.

With this type of an exhilarating scenario, is it not logical to ask what is the real spirit of this extra-ordinary age ? What are its characteristic tendencies, its inspiring ideas, its vital

ingredients and its distinguishing features ? This is rather a tall order to meet. We will make an effort for whatever it is worth.

I

No educated person will deny the fact that we live in an age of science, because the fruits of scientific knowledge are to be seen everywhere. In fact science has virtually superseded both religion and culture, especially in the west. It is, therefore, natural that the spirit which inspires science should also affect men's minds and conduct. In the west this precisely what has happened. And what is this spirit of science ? In one word it is scepticism, viz to doubt everything which has been acceptable only because it has come down from respected authority. Such authority is no longer respected in the sense that it cannot be questioned. Reason and verifiable experience—or experiment in the language of science—founded in reason are to decide what can or cannot be accepted as valid fact or valid explanation. This spirit of free inquiry has enabled men of science to discover new facts or new phenomena and to test old explanations in the light of fresh knowledge, and to discard the same if they proved inadequate or incorrect. Newton was something of a god in physics ; yet his entire system of mechanics and its theoretical premises were boldly questioned by Albert Einstein, another 'god' of science, and a very different system was substituted as a more satisfactory interpretation of nature's behaviour. In turn, Einstein's Theory of Relativity was found not good enough to explain nuclear phenomena and quantum mechanics was invented for the purpose.

The spirit of free inquiry has been the backbone of modern science. It made men gradually but steadily lose faith in religion which depended on respect for received opinion more than on analytical reason.

Religion and morality go together, or at least they did until a century ago. Loss of respect gradually extended to other things as well. Parents, teachers, elders, relatives, virtues of self-sacrifice, charity, compassion, tolerance, honesty, moderation and the like became less respectable. None of this was or is any concern of science. But once men's minds are bent in a particular direction, men look at everything from the new angle, irrespective of whether the same are within the scope of science or not. This is a common failing of men and women. In particular eminent men of learning have contributed greatly to the loosening of old bonds of moral and intellectual discipline.

With the special methods of research introduced by science, quite a few other branches of knowledge have seen the light of day. Intellect has been triumphant and holds the field because its operations are free. Neither prejudice nor inertia halt its activity. Knowledge itself has become a paying industry.

With the immense prestige of science some men believe that science can and will solve all human problems. A Science of Man is mentioned as a cure-all remedy of all the ills of mankind. A Science of Human Behaviour is another hopeful remedy. Principles of science have been extended to unravel the supposed mysteries of organisation and communication and information. Affairs peculiar to society are considered fit matters for 'scientific' treatment. Numberless men and women have been busy spending energy and much else on these novel investigations and their results in which they seem to revel.

Liberty of the individual is the keynote of modern life specially in the western world. Two centuries ago J.J. Rousseau wrote : "Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains.

That was the first sentence of his famous book *The Social Contract* which is said to have had a vast impact on European minds and still commands some influence. It will be remembered that one of the three objectives of the French Revolution was 'liberty'—Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Further, the American Constitution defines the aims of organised living as "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness". Although liberty became a live reality for the majority of middle class men and women, it continued to inspire men from times immemorial. It is now assumed to be a fundamental right of all human beings. With equality, it ranks as the first ingredient of civilised living.

As we all know historical conditions have differed vastly from one country to another. Western scholars have called oriental governments 'oriental despotisms', as if despotism was unknown in the western world. Even so tyranny persisted longer in the Afro-Asian and South American world and still does. Not that it disappeared in the west and north America. Fascism was popular in parts of Europe before the Second World War. Communist Russia too was organised round the principle of total authority for the state, which is only another name for socialist brand of fascism. Still the fact remains that 'liberty' has been the cherished dream of western men and women. In the traditional societies, willing conformity to holy command has been the cherished virtue. "There is not to reason why/There is but to do and die"—is as much a necessity on the battlefield as in the sheltered hut of the saint. The soul of oriental man has been more attuned to the call of total submission and obedience, in which its heroes have seen much felicity in the here and hereafter. Notions of individual liberty could not have found fertile growth in the hearts and minds of eastern men. That is one reason why western political institutions have presented difficulties to oriental practitioners. Western mind craves for untrammelled liberty, while

eastern hearts bend to the whims of saints and inspired men of faith. That is the legacy of history.

None-the-less under western tutelage oriental man has also learnt to eulogise liberty (or freedom) and even to demand it. Westbased education has inscribed it in the hearts of educated men and women ; and these folk carry the alluring burden of political authority and of the state such as it is. For this reason, if for no other, while the minority rules with as much (false) show of modernity as it can manage, the lowly majority, divided and subdivided into hostile groups, finds the reality a nightmare and is unable to extract tangible benefit from it. You can, and often do, blame them for incompetence and corruption, and you are right. Or, with some imagination, excuse them for attempting a novel exercise they find baffling and difficult. The sad fact emerges that by and large men from traditional societies are ill equipped to exercise individual and collective liberty benignly. Nor, for the majority of our societies and states, does it seem likely that we will acquire this precious ability soon enough to make it meaningful.

Notwithstanding these sobering facts, liberty does remain as the most valued acquisition of man in this age. From the Victorian age to the present seems a double jump across a horrid schasm. Man has leapt forward on the road to what he fondly calls self-fulfilment or self-actualisation, whatever that might mean. (It means different things to different men.)

Thanks to technology and the continual changes it brings from day to day, liberty has found an ally in this craze for change. It will be meaningless if divorced from liberty. For, liberty alone permits a truly satisfying utilisation of the fruits of invention and innovation. In fact the liberty to invent and make consequent social changes are essential to the pursuit of material salvation which alone modern man craves to the exclusion of other things. And liberty is necessary on a lower

plane too. In fact it is in day to day affairs that man wants freedom to act as he likes. A trader would like to make higher profits and to evade taxes if he can. A little reflection will show that the scope of liberty is vast in proportion as man's desires, wishes and preferences are innumerable. One cannot hope to satisfy many of them, yet the will to do so remains strong unless repulsed by unfavourable circumstances.

Consider how much liberty men and women already have. They bring up their children as they want. They choose their schools and colleges as far as possible. They are free to go into any vocations as they like subject to fitness. Travel is free though not quite cheap. They can hold and express and canvass any opinions they please. They have the maximum degree of freedom in matters of sexual enjoyment with the minimum of responsibility. They are free to criticise, tactfully if obstruct and cunningly abuse political authority and official functionaries. They can appoint and dismiss governments and semi-government bodies—that is according to law books. They can stay in any hotels and live in any localities if the law of racial segregation doesn't apply, or if you are not black.

In truly democratic countries, citizens are safe from the danger of arbitrary arrests and trial on false charges. Equality before the law is real and effective. You can choose your own lawyer if you can afford the expense, and the lawyer is free to prove that black is white and white black depending on the manipulation of evidence. Society has permitted this strange perversion of liberty for too long a time to cavil at it now. Voters are free, both men and women. Citizens can lawfully agitate against local malpractices and organised evils. People can form new parties in politics, education, social reform, religious matters and for economic change. One can be a candidate for elective bodies and offices. You may hold and discuss subversive opinions as long as you do not create

violent disorder. You can write, print and sell books and enlighten or confuse and mislead the readers. You can delve in lucrative pornography if you are famous or if it can expose more by seeming to hide all. And you can mint money with the publisher's help if you are not concerned with that outdated thing called public morals. You can use liberty if you are conscientious and clean and abuse it if opportunism comes handy to you.

In economic terms there is perhaps too much liberty going round and making rich all and sundry who understand the tricks of the trade. High school failures, cunning rogues, hard working men intent on making good and lucky adventurers enter business at one end and come out millionaires at the other. Big Business and Big Industry rule the capitalist world and make more and more risky to live in like a leaking boat.

Too often liberty has been linked to violence, particularly in this century. Marx upheld one and denigrated the other. It is this linkage which has made human blood flow copiously on flimsy pretexts because emotion gets too easily stirred by a barrage of pleasant rhetoric. On this silly excitability of men politicians thrive and make their fortunes while whole communities are ravaged and impoverished. In some cases liberty may be an impossible or costly dream. But men prefer to be deluded and deceived and a lot of futile strife continues which sanity could prevent in an hour if only men would listen, but they would not for fear of losing face.

Meanwhile liberty remains an attractive slogan for the many and an ideal for the few.

II

Since times immemorial money has attracted men and influenced their conduct in different and sometimes contradictory ways. It was both scarce and unevenly distributed and remains so to this day. A blessing and a curse at the same

time, it has caused bloodshed and vast avoidable suffering. It inspired conquests from distant lands across perilous mountains and more perilous seas. For the majority of people, wealth was an idle dream in the past and in the so-called 'Third World' it still remains so. Whereas in earlier ages, wealth was not a badge of honour, it is the best qualification for prestige and power in our age.

To make money used to be thought to do something dirty or shameful or both. People did make money but did not boast about it. Now it is an enviable distinction, a proof of success and a passport to earthly paradise. People from the highest to the lowest eulogise the rich as the salt of the earth. They deserve praise and get it and are considered heroes—the field marshalls of markets and factories and corporations and banks and the like. Big corporations and super-markets and stock exchanges are the sacred temples of the new age. Loot with blood has made way for loot with cunning and fraud. You make money in all sorts of ways and grant interviews to admiring mediamen about the mysteries of your calling.

In their retirement the rich seem gracious, especially when they donate handsomely for philanthropic purposes. Nobody cares to know *how* they piled bags of money in their times, as crimes artfully hidden are as good as virtuous deeds.

This is the age of industrial culture and it depends on money in huge quantities. Adam Smith made that clear two centuries ago. He did more. He made money and the making of it respectable. The old obloquy no longer stuck to either money or love of money. Economists, his spiritual progeny, have superseded saints and churchmen and appropriated both science and ethics in the bargain. They teach you how to worship in the new temple of money, leaving you to your own devices to make it.

Talking seriously, it is easy to see that only money pressed into the service of industry keeps the modern industrial system moving at an appropriate speed. You have to have money to enter the world of industry. Money supply is needed both for maintenance and expansion. What is more, in the industrial age you cannot shut yourself up in fancy world of your own. During the last two to three centuries, the countries of the world have got integrated into a new system of world economy which functions as a unified body. Whether it functions well or not, is, of course, a different matter. Few things in a world as diverse as ours can function as they should. We have to take them as they are, do our best and be ready for the worst. The world of human beings was never perfect, nor will it ever be, because we are highly imperfect in a hundred ways. Socialists thought otherwise and still do. Recent history with the cataclysmic collapse of the late USSR—might make them wiser.

Although money was always coveted, it is only during the last two centuries that it has been given over-riding importance. There are at least three reasons for this : First, as stated already, money is indispensable to industrialization, and industrialization is the key to prosperity and progress of nations. It is also the only efficient means of meeting human wants on a scale sufficient to reduce gross poverty. Second, industry shifts the emphasis from other things to the production of goods. By doing this it opens the door to a new culture of materialism. Matthew Arnold saw 'anarchy' as the alternative to 'culture'. Another suggestive term is barbarism. Actually what has happened is that a culture of quality or refinement has been supplanted by a culture of goods. The former created an aristocracy of leisure and art ; the latter developed a coarse proletariat of noisy and dissatisfied and rebellious men. Third, money serves as a means of evaluating the different results of

human performance by reducing them to their money equivalents. Although this has been over-done, it is none-the-less useful where it applies. And, in this context, as we all know, money means the US dollar.

The allegation that money has dominant importance in modern life does not require proof. Evidence to prove it lies all around you. There is abundance of all kinds of goods and commodities in the market. The shops will be empty where there is poverty. Even in the poor countries all kinds of foreign goods is available, because there is demand for it though in some cases the demand may be irrational. Banks and insurance companies also underscore the existence of financial dealings. Free markets operate because there is money channeled into them. An army of state and non- state functionaries attests to the stable supply of revenues. Factories and mills and big and small companies proclaim the invested wealth of the nation. Teaching institutions and hospitals and many research bodies are sustained by money, often private money. Roads and railways chocked with passengers notify the financial health of a nation. Charities, learned bodies, social and other institutes are in business because there are surplus funds available. And of course the millionaires and billionaires are also there lest you forget.

Money is the life blood of the modern body—politic. Money has instant potency. It buys everything except health, happiness and peace of mind. It commands publicity, reputation, influence, votes, office, prestige, power including power to corrupt and be corrupted, patronage, even honour, (What money cannot do is to deceive oneself and save one's conscience from debasement.)

Money is the living symbol of an age of spiritual exhaustion and material achievement.

III

Modern age has acquired an unusual feature by having politics brought down from the high heavens to the lives of ordinary men and women. It ceased to be the exclusive privilege of aristocrats and specialists who handled it as if it was a mysterious science fit only for the likes of them. Politics was open to the illiterate masses of Asia and Africa and south America as much as it was to the educated public of Europe and north America. All sorts of people talked of politics as though it was a parlour game. They not only talked about it ; they influenced and controlled it in some degree as representative government came to be accepted as the norm of the political process. They had become actors involved deeply in this process. They had their hands on the levers of power.

With the tacit acceptance of representative government came inevitably the acceptance of 'democracy' as the best practicable system of governance. It was practised in U.K., the U.S.A., Canada, the Low Countries and Sweden. Before World War I there were monarchies in parts of Europe which seemed headed for constitutional rule under symbolic monarchs. The war swept aside many of them. The age of democracy had come with a bang. It was the political fashion to acknowledge the virtues of democracy even while dictators seized power in Italy and Germany and, later , in Spain, they were obliged to pretend that they too had a different brand of democracy. After World War II, with the Americans in control of half the world, democracy became the touchstone of good government except where state necessity dictated otherwise. With the Americans 'democracy' became an obsession. Friends and foes were judged in its terms. It became a test of good government. Whether they were able to instil the basic idea is open to question. But about their sincere desire to promote the idea and the system, there can hardly be serious

doubt. One disservice that the late U.S.S.R. did to the world was to make all sorts of dictatorships appear respectable as long as they owed allegiance to it. It was power politics in its naked ugliness. With the former U.S.S.R gone into the dustbin of history, dictatorships lost their theoretical base.

The only challenge to democracy as an idea and a functioning system had come from socialism or communism. Now the vitality of democracy's alternative seems likely to decay. Western Europe was its nursery ; but it is no more except for some obstinate cranks and their dwindling line of followers.

While there is no denying the fact that democracy is one of the identification marks of industrial civilisation it is also true that barring western Europe and north America, it is more of a dream than a reality. Most of Asia is undemocratic. The exceptions are India, Lanka, Singapore, Hongkong, Japan and Israel. Pakistan is at heart non-democratic, given its feudal society and misapplied religion. The Arab lands are kingdoms and bogus communist governments whose only concession to communism is one-party states resting on tribal traditions of intolerance and savage cruelty. This applies with some qualifications to north African states. Most of Africa is a bizarre scene of tribes given the status of modern states by the simple expedient of drawing boundary lines on a map accepted by the United Nations. The east African littoral is an odd mixture of modernised tribalism and a modicum of unstable secularism, ruled in part by ambitious politicians and adventurous military figures. Libya is a poor model of communism. So are Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique and Algeria. Egypt is one-party state, its secular ruling class unwilling to cede power to any group other than its own. The religious parties make the mistake of embracing unprincipled terrorism as a weapon in aid of the ballot. Turkey gave the veto to the

army long ago and it does not respect the electoral verdict as an irrevocable fact.

The south Asian mainland has been a sad battle-ground between unscrupulous forces of modified communism and misunderstood democracy bolstered by the bounty US dollars and chewing gum. With the Americans defeat in Vietnam, communism made more bloodbaths in this region than Tamerlane did in his life. The scene is only seemingly less chaotic than before. Burma is a sealed book no one is able to open. China, despite the failure of the marxian (communist) system, is unwilling to admit the fact and clings to the myth of Party infallibility and the disastrous principle of centralised control. It has reaffirmed its undying loyalty to communism, more to reassure itself, while legalising private profit and private property and establishing an economy of the free market and free enterprise within thin ill-defined limits. So what does this mosaic indicate ? It may mean that communism (Marxism) is in retreat, not on the run—that is, not yet.

What about South American ? It is easy to answer this question : Most countries of this continent are or have been under dictatorial rule. The democratic principle is alien to its unhappy people. The exceptions, if any, have been very few.

As for eastern Europe recently freed from Soviet rule, it is idle to hope that parliamentary democracy will sprout in this infertile soil. Certainly there will be a facade of democracy without which international respect and co-operation may not be available in a world trying to reshape itself. Yet it is one thing to have the external appearance and appurtenances of a system and to have its spirit as well. The first is without real benefit; while the second is full of many fruits of benign governance, such as peace within and without, a contented populace, justice and liberty and equality in increasing measure for all.

Thus, it is clear from existing facts that while democracy is in high fashion, its practice is not, and, in fact, cannot be. Why is this so ? This is due to the ineradicable legacy of the past. As we all know, there are only two countries in the world, where the people resisted despotic rulers and waged war to defeat autocracy. A third could be doubtfully added as it rebelled and overthrew the King and his outdated system. (Czarist Russia.) It should also be noted that the United States was colonised by the British settlers, though they were jail birds and undesirables. Britain led in colonising north America, and the French followed suit in what is modern Canada. Democracy of the westminister kind works there as people there inherited liberal democratic traditions of governance and social life. For the same reasons, it works in Australia. It is the people with their special character which accounts for the success or failure of a particular political (and economic) system. This cannot be made to order.

What has been the common experience of mankind as regards their rulers ? Though it looks formidable, it is yet a very easy question to answer. With local variations, It has been mostly unhappy, though not admitted as such. In a capsule form it may be summarised as under :

1. Rulers have always ruled without the consent of their subjects. The question of consent never arose.
2. They ruled without regard to the well-being of their people.
3. Their authority was absolute as far as this was practicable.
4. The citizen had no right on the state. (He had it on his society but subject to custom and convention.)

5. One of the highest virtues was to obey competent authority. (It was also the case for communist governments.)

6. The rulers chose their advisers, ministers or assistants in their sole discretion. And they served him during his pleasure.

7. The ruler was above the law of the land, which did not apply to him.

8. The ruler ruled by issuing decrees. So did his ministers in his name.

9. The chief duty of the ruler was to keep peace within and without his dominion. He was also to ensure that justice was done in the event of disputes between parties and when crimes were committed and disorder threatened.

10. The King (or ruler) could not be arraigned or impeached for alleged (or proved) misdeeds. He could abdicate by his free will. As a short list this will do. Now, you can judge for yourself if humanity living under such conditions for endless centuries could develop qualities which democracy demands. Both history and common sense show that it could not. Hence, the absence of such qualities cannot be deemed a slur on human character on the whole.

You can appreciate better why the democratic experiment almost everywhere is a virtual failure.

IV

In 1791, Thomas Paine wrote a book, 'The Rights of Man' which became instantly popular and sold 75000 copies in a week. Its author, a British citizen, had to seek safety in France to escape arrest in his own country. It was written as an answer to Edmund Burke's harsh strictures on the French Revolution, which was then two years old. The book was unexpectedly

popular and it defended the French Revolution and the principles it espoused.

Paine argued from a few basic premises, namely :

(1) All men are born free and equal.

(2) Men have certain rights which are natural and cannot be taken away. These are : liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression.

(3) The people are the source of sovereignty. All authority is derived from them.

Though these items are very general, yet they contain the bulk of liberal¹ philosophy. Each item can be elaborated to define much of what, for instance, the French revolutionaries were fighting for. It is the kernel of what conservatives even today may hold as subversive doctrine.

Paine set the pace for defining and demanding human and other rights and in the post-World War II era, nothing is more common than to hear all sorts of bodies demanding various kinds of rights for their members or clients. Indeed this is an age of "rights" with a vengeance. Apart from rights of men, we hear of the rights of women. Then, you have the rights of labour, rights of the unemployed, the rights of the aged and the sick, the rights of specified minorities—Muslims, low caste Hindus, Sikhs and Christians in India, Catholics in North Ireland, Moro Muslims in Philippines, Red Indians in the USA, Bushmen in Australia, descendants of original inhabitants of South America, Kurds and Palestinians in the Middle East, etc. There are groups wanting rights for homosexuals of both sexes. Then there are the rights of domesticated animals against cruelty. Sportsmen, mountaineers and shikaris also need special rights. Poor widows, wives deserted by husbands, unwed mothers must have their separate

rights. Now 'senior' citizens also have discovered they needed particular rights. Animals and birds have rights not to be shot in their breeding season. There are rights of the environment against pollution and degradation. So also has the lately discovered but vastly important eco-system and the mysterious bio-sphere. Some women demand the right to abortion while some others insist on the right of the unborn to see the light of day under all circumstances. Then there are the rights of the Press—journalists, reporters, editors, printers and publishers. You can add to this list as much as you like.

Modern man is conscious of a variety of rights which are seldom available in practice. They add to men's unease because of a sense of deprivation of that account. The alleged rights do go some way in pointing to futilities and tragedies of our age laden with unrealised hopes and glorious achievements and squalid failures.

There are other characteristics of this age which define its spirit but there is not space enough to mention and discuss them. What has been summarised above should be adequate to delineate its' basic tendencies and trends..

5

The Doctrine of Communism

If we ponder over the story of human life, we will find that its sum total can be described in just three words, namely toil, suffering and happiness. We have passed through countless stages of progress, now called development. Many civilisations have risen and fallen and now man boasts that he has conquered nature itself. It is not an idle boast, though it has created its own problems which baffle us in our pursuit of the so-called 'good life'. The harshness of toil has been overcome by computers, automation and other ingenious devices. Yet toil is still there and in traditional societies, it continues to be painful.

As for suffering and happiness, they arise in part from the effects of toil and in part from the constitution of man himself. Quantitatively their incidence per individual may have changed for the better, but if you remember Hiroshima and the shameless slaughter of the two mega-wars and the ceaseless killings and bloody revolts and tortures and concentration camps and the cruel treatment of minorities in our own day, you will not deny that suffering remains the lot of man. Add to this the grinding poverty of the many and the obscene richness of the very few, and you see how ugly suffering has been. Then there are the new killer diseases and environmental damage and run-away population increase and the economic upsettings beyond human manipulation. A whole array of distressing events of all kinds have emerged without hope of real and effective remedies. No doubt sufferings are part of life and will be so till the end of time.

As for happiness, mankind has had it marginally. It was and remains elusive and fitful. While means of pleasure as distinguished from happiness have indeed vastly increased, those which conduce to happiness have possibly shrunk. Happiness comes from *within* man, a fact not appreciated in our age and will not be. We need not go into this subtle distinction here.

Thoughtful men have reflected on this enduring aspect of the human condition through the ages. In the past, saints, sages and savants had their own diagnosis and their own prescriptions for betterment. Those times are gone and solutions now sought are in terms of reordering society along new lines and to achieve new objectives. Ours is a materialist age and its perceptions and remedies are, therefore, materialist in nature. The remedies are external whereas, in the past, they were internal to man. Now we are told to establish new institutions. Formerly the emphasis was on producing new

(and better) men. Both types of solutions proved to be beyond human competence.

Since the eighteenth century men paid more attention to problems of political reform and economic improvement. This was the phase of liberalism which was to attract more and more sober men who were dedicated to the cause. The quest for political remedy led to democracy while the economic solution was believed to lie in socialism. The first was more popular in Britain and the second in France and the position still roughly holds.

There were also some gifted men who launched practical schemes of socialism in France and the United States. Saint Simon and Fourier in France and the Mormon community in the United States tried the experiment which eventually failed, but not due to inherent flaws in the doctrine itself. Others like Proudhon, Owen, Ricardo and many others kept themselves to theorising. This too was important.

In the nineteenth century Europe was in a ferment. Nationalism was a new force which gave birth to a number of states, including the unification of Italy. The old order was crumbling fast and industrialism was changing life styles all over the western world. Karl Marx propounded his economic system in this world of rapid change and extravagant hopes.

Marx boasted that his brand of socialism was 'scientific'. In a sense and within the limits of his philosophy, he did not boast in vain. And he proceeded to set in motion revolutionary organisations in the hope of awakening the industrial workers to their new duties prescribed by himself. With many ups and downs he passed away having attempted to kindle a new flame for mankind's final destiny.

We may now briefly mention the essential contents of Marxism (communism.) We need not describe the philosophy of which Marx's system forms a part as this is not quite

necessary. Instead, we will give the *operational* elements of the Marxian system.

Karl Marx was a student and, later, a Professor of philosophy. He was deeply influenced by Hegel whose idea of the primacy of society over the individual strongly appealed to him. Had the German authorities been more tolerant and less vindictive, he would not have been obliged to flee his own country. In that case the history of the world would have been significantly different. We give now the more important propositions of his formulation of the communist doctrine or dogma :

(1) In Marx's view, the individual as a member of society has no rights apart from the society itself. He is a building block of the social structure; and without society and his membership of it, he is a nullity in the social sense. In that type of situation he is no better than a savage.

(2) It follows that an individual has no remedy if he suffers from excesses committed by government or agencies of government. As between individuals, disputes can be settled by law courts. But since every one is an employee of government in a communist state, the one holding a higher rank will ordinarily have an advantage over his adversary which may influence judgement.

(3) The communist state represents the highest condition of development of human society. As such no free thinking which might undermine its foundation is permissible. There is no right to subversive opinion or conduct.

(4) Opposition to the state or state policy is tantamount to high treason. Not only is a person who actually committed treason liable to punishment, but also one who, in the *opinion* of authority, is likely to commit it. Actual and potential offenders suffer punishment.

Any comment on this is needless. It is the basis of legalised tyranny.

(5) The Communist Party alone is the instrument of carrying out policies of the state. These policies are not subject to public debate or discussion. Hence, there can only be one party in the communist state. Criticism and objection are, therefore, ruled out.

(6) The right to own property is abolished.

The land-owning gentry and peasantry both become paupers. This leads to compulsory collectivisation (dekulakisation) of land which now belongs to the state. Nobody could foresee that in the highly brutal manner of collectivisation lay the seeds of the eventual undoing of the Soviet state.

(7) The right to private profit is abolished.

This destroys the foundation of capitalism in any shape or form.

(8) The state is responsible for the upbringing, education, health and employment of children.

(9) The state is responsible for feeding, housing, medically treating and employing its adult citizens.

The impossible burden accepted by the state can only perpetuate permanent discontent undermining loyalty.

(10) All ideological systems are closed systems. So is a communist state and society.

So they are protected from winds of change from outside. Foreign ideas, opinions, methods and fashions have, therefore, to be excluded, as they would otherwise contaminate and poison the original base of the communist structure.

(11) The Communist Party as embodying the workers will has the right to the monopoly of state power. Hence the indirect establishment of the so-called dictatorship of the pro-letariat.

(12) The Communist Party is believed to be the guardian of workers, so it is assumed that the workers do not require any rights such as they are given in a capitalist state. They lose the right to strike in a communist country.

(13) The denial of the right to own property and to make profits at once eliminates what is called the free market, as also the free competition on which it depends. This capitalist-oriented market had to be replaced by a state controlled and state managed economy and it was here that the communist authorities in Russia failed after Lenin.

(14) In Marxian view of history, it was the economic classes in any society which created class war. Only in subsistence economies were class distinctions non-existent for obvious reasons. During various phases of historical evolution these distinctions kept on evolving, until, in the industrial age, they became incurably acute. There was no escape from a 'classless' society if civilisation was not to be destroyed by internal disorder and decay (contradictions of capitalism.)

(15) All important policy decisions were to be taken by central authorities. There was to be no devolution of authority to those implementing decisions.

This is approximately a correct and complete picture of the communist theoretical framework or dogma. A few minor items might be added to this list, but we trust there is no major omission.

A few brief remarks on this system by way of comment may be in order. First, you will notice that it presents an ideal

prescription for despotic governance far exceeding Czars' in scope and efficacy. Only a cruel, irresponsible and repressive authority can be erected on its foundation. And that is what actually happened. Second, a one party state excludes all chance of exposing evils and misdeeds of rulers and the excesses of the ruling party. The sole irremovable party is like a coarse aristocracy minus its traditional virtue. Third, the new Government had accepted an impossible burden for supplying *all* the human wants of the population. Even a lunatic could see the tragic absurdity of this system. From the products of the bakery to hundreds of things you buy from a super-market, household gadgets of every day need, equipment for hundreds of shops and offices and clinics, the things needed for modern farms, public transport, railways and airplanes, newspaper and magazines, a thousand wants of every type of industry, schools and colleges and their equipment—the list is endless—all this to be the duty of the state to supply ! The whole idea seems absurd. Fourth, mistrust of people was to be the basis of governance. This created a 'police' state with every citizen coming under police surveillance. Secret police of different categories covered the whole population, and since citizens had no civic rights, they continued to suffer from the most barbarous treatment mostly on groundless suspicions. No better method of earning unpopularity could be invented ! Fifth, Collectivisation of land was carried out at a cost of about six to ten million lives. One not used to such a life would find it difficult to believe it. Yet it happened to be a fact—perhaps the worst blot on any rulers in history. To Stalin the dogma was more important than human lives. Sixth, the Soviet government was based on force and not on the free consent of the people. Otherwise, where was the need of the constant spying on people and of shutting out the rest of the world from them ? Seventh, there was no communication between the rulers and the ruled. Government

was carried on in secret; not a glimpse was permitted to the profane sight of the public. This made rulers and ruled aliens to each other. This cannot guarantee stability to any government. Eighth, while the old bourgeoisie was liquidated a new class of highly privileged and irresponsible men—the Communist Party and its minions—acquired a status like that of the old gentry but far more powerful. They had an effective grip over each unit or agency of government all over the country. Their will prevailed and no authority except their own could restrain them. They were sub-rulers with absolute powers such as the Czars' aristocrats could not dream of. One could ask if this was the way to create a 'classless' society.

Incidentally, it may be noted that the Bolsheviks (communists) in their exuberance and pride chose to violate a few well-known and accepted lessons of history. They still are sound canons of good and enduring governance. These are :

One, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. (Lord Acton). The only exceptions are prophets and saints, a rare breed.

Two, safe and durable governance is based only on the consent of the governed, implicit or explicit. There is no substitute for consent.

Three, mistrust breeds mistrust and creates a climate of fear and hate and this leads to disloyalty, open or concealed.

Four, power confers benefits when diffused in subordinate agents.

Five, force cannot and does not make men better in any desirable sense. Violence, as an expression of force, fails in the long run when it is opposed to the will of the people. Hence, masses freely unconverted to an ideology or creed will get rid of it whenever it is safe to do so.

6

The Soviet Citizen

There are now (November 1992) one hundred and seventy six members of the United Nations, a body whose prestige is as great as its known impotence. All these countries are independent, each having its own flag. Citizens of one country take pride in belonging to it; and some of the big ones boast of its distinctive qualities as a nation. By and large, Britons are proud of having the right of free speech. They can and do actually criticise their rulers and their policies fearlessly. The French are justly proud of their culture and refinement. The Germans are conscious of their vitality as a race and their contribution to music and architecture. The Scandinavian people are proud of their welfare state systems. The

Yankies (USA) talk justly about their free enterprise and liberty. China and India can boast of their ancient civilisations. Even the people of Islam are proud of their illustrious forebears and their religion. What are the Soviet citizens proud of ? Or rather were ?

Two answers immediately seem obvious. One, that the USSR was the first socialist (communist) state to be established in the world by human design. Second, that Russia (USSR) was the largest country in the world. But these answers show nothing in the way of excellence of which one could be proud, nor admirable quality or historical achievement. The fact is that Russian people have had a long history of pernicious and cruel rule which made them docile and tolerant of much evil in upper levels of society. Not that such things have not happened in other lands. Tyranny and repression have been the common lot of most communities in the world, and it continues to remain still the most bitter fruit of human life. So the Russians cannot be singled out for castigation on this score.

If you reflect on what the average citizen got out of the much advertised Soviet system which they would not have received from the old capitalist system—with or without czardom—you may be chilled to the bone on the vast tragic and needless suffering of the unfortunate Russian people and those countless non-Russians who were yoked with them to a most inhuman slavery in the name of a pompous ideology. This is not to say that communism did not confer some signal benefits on its peoples. To the labouring masses it gave much in the way of education, health care, housing, employment and even amusement. But the thing to remember is that those benefits, in varying proportions, were bound to come to them as a result of industrialisation under a non-socialist regime as well. It might have taken longer to achieve the same, or nearly

the same, results. But in that case, the immense misery inflicted on them would have been entirely avoided. Inspite of the evils of capitalism which cannot be condoned, this much can be safely concluded that industrial progress of the country could have been achieved without horrible killings and reduction of the populace to the status of virtual slaves. Nor would the ghastly tragedy of compulsory collectivisation of land would have been necessary. Now that the Soviet state has collapsed under its own massive failures and blunders, the bloody drama of killings and deportations of whole populations and 'purges' on false charges, as also suppression of revolts of unarmed peoples in satellite countries might seem irrelevant episodes of a distant and forgotten past. But man has to learn from his past and draw lessons for escaping blunders in the future. That man does this very unsatisfactorily is evident from even a casual at his history.

It may be objected that it is unfair to compare actual history with a hypothetical alternative of the same. No doubt some sort of difficulty is inherent in the comparison of what has been with what might have been. Yet this way of assessing reality is neither uncommon nor illogical. This type of comparison is necessary to evaluate what has happened or been done. Unless we know that an alternative course was possible and could be taken, how can we judge that what was chosen and adopted was right or wrong ? One example will make it clear. As we know, there were general elections in Britain after World War II, due to which the Labour Party won a landslide victory and came into power. This party was committed to India's independence and it freed India and partitioned the sub-continent. Had the Conservative Party won the elections, it was possible that the sub-continent would not have been granted independence right away. So the significance of this election from our point of view cannot be disputed.

I

We were considering what special virtue there was or could be in the communist state-system to make its 'average' citizen proud of belonging to it. Perhaps it may seem ungenerous to ask such a question now that the Soviet system has fallen. But in matters of comparative assessment of states and societies, we have to lay sentimental considerations aside and judge as honestly as possible. In our opinion the Soviet (communist) citizen had nothing of which he could be proud and had much of which he could be ashamed.

Among honest observers of the history of this century there would be many who would not hesitate to call it a slave state. And though slavery was formally abolished a long time ago, the mental frame which delights in enslaving people at large has not disappeared. Through the ages man has shown a strong tendency to subdue and subjugates other men, his own as well as aliens and to impose his will on them. We have only to recall what Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Franco did in their own countries in this century. There were the infamous Pot Pol, Idi Amin and dozens of others who did their worst to enslave millions of people and making them like a modified model of slaves. It is unfortunate that refuge was sought in ideologies to excuse the most inhuman misdeeds by this breed of men. Consider the numerous dictators and tyrants who have continued to seize power in practically all the countries of South America and rule them ruthlessly. East Asia including Burma, has seen too many merciless rogues ruining their unlucky lands.

That vestiges of organised slavery have existed can hardly be denied. The treatment meted out to original inhabitants of USA and Australia and South America by the 'civilised' colonisers is a shameful chapter in modern history. We have

the baffling case of South Africa treating its non-white majorities as if they were wild beasts. The battle to restore to these deprived men the rudiments of human dignity of which they were barbarously deprived remains to be won.

The current fashionable word is 'disadvantaged' and not enslaved when describing the misfortunes visited upon these luckless people. But this barbarity proceeds from the same perverse mentality which, in the past, caused ancient tyrants and adventurers to enslave whole communities and allot individuals as slaves to their own folk. The treatment has altered in recent history but the temper which perpetuated slavery in the past has not vanished. Hitler treated Jews and dissenters as if the victims were slaves or worse. His ideological defence lay in fascism of which an intellectual framework had been worked out by Mussolini in Europe. When you have some such system to fall back upon, it is considered less inexcusable, howsoever hideous and sinister the system might be. It might be called vestigial slavery to appease objectors.

II

If we consider the vast inferiority of the citizen of the former USSR to his opposite number in UK or USA we are certain to be disappointed. But a better appreciation of the position of the former would be possible if we consider in how many respects he comes closer to the standard type of slave. We may compare the standard type of slave with an average citizen of the late USSR and the USA. The comparison would be an eye opener to many who do not have the time or the knowledge to reflect on such matters. We have chosen at random certain items for comparison to bring out how near or far an average slave of the past was from the average citizens of what were the world's super-powers one still is. Impartiality in comparisons is essential, though not

always easy. We have tried to be as objectively honest as possible.

We have marked the facts, real and hypothetical, about the life of a slave as (a) those of the Russian (communist) citizen as (b) and those of a United States citizen as (c) Here is the Statement of facts :

1. (a) The Slave is owned by his master.
 - (b) He (the communist citizen) is not 'owned' by the State in the proprietorial sense. But he is under his State's tutelage as ward under a guardian.
 - (c) This is inapplicable. He is his own master.
2. (a) The Greeks and Romans did not consider their slaves as human beings at all.
 - (b) Does not apply.
 - (c) Does not apply.
3. (a) The slave was like a commodity, transferable at the master's will.
 - (b) & (c) inapplicable.
 - (3) (a) He did not opt to be a slave.
 - (b) He was forced by communist rulers to be a communist citizen.
 - (c) He chose to be a free citizen.
4. (a) He could not change his master.
 - (b) He does not have the right to migrate to another country. With luck, he might do that unlawfully.
 - (c) He could go to and live anywhere.
5. (a) He had no rights but only duties.

(b) He has no rights against the State.

(c) He has a full range of well defined and protected rights. Duties are fixed by prescriptive conventions.

6. (a) He could not form a union with other slaves to change or overthrow the slave system

(b) He could not form a union or party.

(c) He was free to do for lawful purposes.

7. (a) The slave had no say in any affairs of the master. He might be consulted as matter of favour.

(c) He had no right to advise.

(d) He sends his representative to advise, criticise, approve or condemn on his behalf. His opinion merging in that of his class or community influences decisions.

8. (a) He was free in the matter of personal belief except for subversive opinion.

(b) He could hold beliefs as laid down by the communist Party or state.

(c) He is absolutely free to believe anything but not to propagate violent subversion.

9. (a) He was free in matters of religion.

(b) Religion is barred to him.

(c) He is free absolutely.

10. (a) Children of slaves were slaves unless freed.

(b) Children of communists could only be communists.

(c) His children were born free.

11. (a) He could not marry without his master's permission.

- (b) He was free to marry communist a female
- (c) He is absolutely free to marry.

12. (a) Nil.

- (b) Soviet citizens were distrusted by the state and the Communist Party.
- (c) They were fully trusted as a principle except when there was evidence to the contrary.

13. (a) He could not travel without his master's permission.

- (b) He could not go to another town without clearance from security police officials involving several departments.
- (c) He could travel as he liked except when it was a security risk, hardly one in a million.

14. (a) Slaves and their progeny were debarred from education.

- (b) His children were to be educated by the state.
- (c) He could educate them as he preferred.

15. (a) Slaves were subject to savage punishments.

- (b) So were communist citizens.
- (c) A very flexible liberal law punishes those proved guilty after due process.

16. (a) He could not own property.

- (b) He too could not do so.
- (c) He could own it subject to law.

17. (a) Law and institutions of justice did not exist for him.

- (b) Law and judiciary existed but mostly to the detriment of the citizen, especially when the state prosecuted him.

(c) They fully protected him from injustice within limits of reason.

18. (a) Nil.

(b) Soviet judiciary was on principle obliged to favour the state to the unjustifiable detriment of the suspected citizen.

(c) He was guaranteed full justice under all circumstances.

19. (a) Slaves could buy freedom by extra labour.

(b) The communist citizen had no right to buy himself out of his communist (Soviet) bondage.

From these facts it is easy to judge how much of his ancient slave ancestry the Russian (communist) was obliged to carry in this century, buzzing all the time with slogans and declarations of all kinds of rights for a large variety of beneficiaries. Peoples in backward countries who perpetually grumble against all sorts of inequities should ponder over how much of life's blessings they *still* have despite many deprivations. They are advised to consider how much of their injustices arise from incompetence and dishonesty and selfishness of their leaders as also of their own people traditionally and falsely praised for qualities they do not possess.

III

We hope we have given a correct, if bald, description of the over-all status of a former Russian (Communist) citizen. For over seventy years he has been obliged to lead a life in which elements essential to emotional satisfaction and intellectual integrity were conspicuously lacking. Doubtless he got much in the form of bread, employment, housing, hospitals, education and other lesser amenities. Given the Czarist days of privilege and extravagance and despotic rule, the

people at large savoured the new gains with some satisfaction. It would be ingratitude not to do so.

Yet one has to repeat the time worn bourgeoisie dictum that man does not live by bread alone. Even for a man drenched in an all-embracing materialism, some other kinds of satisfaction are needed. We all know what they are. The British rulers of India in their times did not restrict this type of satisfaction. We have been less careful in this respect both in India and Pakistan and Burma.

In the light of what has been said above about the former communist (Soviet) citizen, can we infer what deficiencies he was likely to acquire over the years ? Let us also do this unpleasant duty of indicating these features of his general personality. In other words, let us see what type of an individual is likely to evolve from the unfavourable social habitat that encompassed him for so long. Here is this short but depressing catalogue :

(1) A person who is subject to serious disabilities is certain to lack self-confidence. He will be diffident and incapable of initiative and bold judgments. He will not have qualities of leadership.

(2) One who is always distrusted is most likely to become a rebel. Trust begets trust ; and the opposite of this also true. During training young officers are entrusted with authority and responsibility. That is how they learn to exercise power constructively. In communist Russia the converse of this was the rule. Even Generals and Marshals of the army in Stalin's time were espied upon and distrusted.

(3) He would lack nobler impulses associated with liberty, affluence and limited power, such as forgiveness, self-discipline, abstinence, self-sacrifice, humility and consideration for others. Meaner qualities breed meaner men-treacherous, cowardly, selfish, corruptible and shifty.

(4) Men converted to an ideology under duress do not make staunch believers. They, and, to some extent, their children, will disown the new faith as soon as it is safe to do so.

(5) Such a person will tend to be disloyal. The Second World war furnished ample proof of this.

(6) Where institutions of justice do not exist or are weak, there will be no contentment and a tendency toward lawlessness will prevail. Justice denied or aborted is an invitation to revolt at favourable opportunities. A genuinely loyal populace cannot be tailor made except through decency generosity and pure justice.

These remarks are not empty verbiage. They embody the greater part of the bitter experience of mankind since organised human life began on this luckless planet. The chief lessons of history—and pre-history—are only a few and they are so very simple you will hardly believe them. Man's tragedy lies not in his persistence in dangerous error, but in his blind passion to refuse to try alternative cures.

The Fall

The former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was the largest country in the world in area of land-mass. It covered the whole of Eurasia in the north and its land immediately to the west of the Ural mountains is also enormous by any standard. Its victory over Nazi Germany in 1945 gave it the chance to enslave nine countries of eastern Europe on the ground that each of them accepted communism as its state ideology. In fact large Russian armies occupied these countries to ensure their continuance under the Russian yoke. A sort of common market was thus established under Russian supremacy. Indigenous communist rulers of these states were

selected and approved by Russians. Their state structures were a faithful copy of that of the USSR.

These were the three Baltic states, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia besides Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany. Officially each was independent and also a member of the United Nations. But in fact each was tightly controlled by the late Soviet Union. Each was a member of the Warsaw Pact with not a whit of benefit, but their armies were at Russia's disposal in the event of war in western Europe. And the USA maintained Nato armies in western Europe. This was how the so called 'cold war' was kept needlessly smouldering since the early sixties. Military preparedness was a sign of greatness and even a communist empire was glad its war standard was flying over the historic citadels of Europe.

Nominally independent, each of these satellite countries was bound tightly to the USSR. Its development, its budgets, its civic and constitutional bodies were under Russian control and regulation. Prices of some goods were fixed with Russian approval. Part of the produce of land and factories had to be delivered to USSR at prices as agreed upon between the two parties. It is easy to see who would have the upper hand in such dealings. Quotas and targets of production were fixed with Russian concurrence. From Russia the satellites (states) received their share of requirements of oil, energy, war equipment, advisers, assistants, metals and shoddy consumer goods at concession rates. Communist parties, one party state, dictatorship, absence of public control and access to information, secret police, torture in lieu of judicial action, total ban on adverse opinion, and hero-worship were essential parts of the system. The proletariat were assured full employment, free education, medical care and housing as far as possible. A habit of dependence on rulers for everything inevitably developed.

It was a closed system sealed from the rest of the world and safe from the vexatious fluctuations of the capitalist world market. However, the weakness of such a system is also obvious. (A remote analogy might be seen in the 'Ma-Bap' type of local administration introduced by British rulers in India.)

Eastern Europe was not converted to the politico-economic religion of Marxist communism. No doubt a lot of men and women jumped on the Marxian bandwagon and filled the new administration and its numberless jobs. Indigenuous communists were not in short supply either. Quislings are rather a common breed and they were there all over eastern Europe to man and manage the new socialist governments. Local communist parties were the core of the new state mechanism and did their job with a good deal of loyalty. It had gained supremacy by the courtesy of the occupying Russian armies. The cost of keeping and maintaining them was debited to the host countries—of course with their alleged consent ! Religion was abolished as an anachronism in the lands of scientific socialism. Churches and mosques were closed down and their properties seized and their schools taken over. All this was done with the supposed approval of the enlightened proletariat.

Was this make-believe world real in any sense ?

I

Through his sojourn on the planet earth, man has had three principal resources in dealing with nature, his own kind and metaphysical issues of divine revelation. His resources were and still are force, reason and love. How to make a judicious use of these resources of assets has been man's unresolved problem upto date. In his known history, man has made excessive use of force as it came handy and convenient. Dealing with other men has been his most persistent difficulty. Certain

qualities *within* himself made their solution intractable. A great deal of human thinking has gone to this problem and its many aspects but without conspicuous success. Today, after centuries of ordered living, man is back to square one.

Man's problems arising from collective living have varied from time to time, depending upon how man made things to make life less harsh. He set up different types of governing systems and found most of them wanting. He allowed his kind to be by turns absolutely free and absolutely unfree. With the advent of our present machine age, the philosophy of absolute freedom of man was seen to have been producing much greater social injustice than ever before. Socialism was one tempting solution of the problem. The core of this solution was to vest ownership of primary means of production—such as agriculture, mining, manufacture of goods—in the state, dislodging the individual from ownership of the same. This, in the crudest terms was the socialist prescription and still is.

It will be seen that the *socialist* remedy takes away a good deal of man's economic freedom, thereby eliminating the chance of making huge profits. It also restricted man's right to create and own property, especially profit-yielding property. But it left much of man's political liberty intact. The central political issues were ; (1) to choose rulers freely from time to time : (2) to call them to account when necessary ; (3) to oblige them to account for their misdeeds, if any ; (4) to sustain independent and honest judiciary ; and (5) to vest in individuals the right to liberties not expressly forbidden by law. Accordingly a good deal of political liberty was left intact, which permitted democracy to be practised in reasonable degree. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, socialist ideas were developed in convenient isolation from the world of harsh realities. Then Karl Marx in the last century produced his version which he called 'scientific' socialism.

He stripped man of all liberty, upholding Hegel's concept of the state as a credible manifestation of the Absolute, whatever that might mean. The idea of democracy was repugnant to his Teutonic mind. Socialism was to him as sacred as the Bible to Christians. The Communist Party could and did represent the proletariat, which meant factory workers. They were the new rulers of the socialist state. They were invested with powers not limited by statute or convention. The rest of the communist doctrine was spun round the total denial of freedom to the individual apart from the state or society.

II

In Marx's thinking force as a means of solving human problems assumed high importance. It is rather odd that Marx was not impressed by the one over-riding lesson of history—not to give excessive power to any individual or body of individuals. It was the trend of German thinking which he failed to shake off. Instead, he made excessive and unquestioned authority the cornerstone of his philosophy. From this proceeded all the evils which Lenin planted on the Russian people. Force was also dear to him as it rested in *him* after the success of the communists in the civil war.

The socialism of Marx was rammed down the throats of helpless millions of the unfortunate Russian people. They were to accept and implement it at the peril to their lives. From one tyranny they were delivered to another against their will. It was blazoned around the world that a new heaven and a new earth had been created by the magic of Marxism. Without the least regard to human feeling, the new rulers started driving a half-dead horse at high speed to attain heavy industrialisation, not counting the human cost. At best industrialisation is a brutal process, inflicting damage on human psychology. It is the new methods of work by use of machines which initially harm the workers badly. This happens when

the owner is the capitalist individual and also when the state owns the plant. In other social effects they differ, no doubt but not in the operational side of industries. Lenin was himself in favour of a fast developing economy mounted on the backs of people who were assigned jobs as industrial workers. Unlike the accursed capitalist system, they were not free to negotiate with the new masters, who were almighty and had only to be obeyed with good grace. Workers too had no rights though they owned the State.

In such conditions a soulless drive for high speed industrialisation could only be resented. By and large, workers had no stake in the success or prosperity of the industry where they were employed. Wages remained low and were not related to rise in output. They formed trade unions under the directives of members of the almighty Communist party. Workers were destitute of all powers of resistance and protest. Can such a body of men and women be expected to be loyal to the Party or the State ?

III

Perhaps there never was any instance in history when about two hundred million people were forced to give up their religious beliefs and accept a pseudo-ideological system as the new substitute for religion. Yet Lenin and his henchmen just tried to do that. Atheism was decreed as an essential part of the new dispensation. All the coercive powers of the state were deployed against recalcitrant citizens. No one could buy bread or butter and other things could only be bought if one had a card officially issued to control consumption. Jobs could not be had except by government's favour. Housing, medical aid and the like were provided by official agencies. How could any intrepid soul resist government's campaign to educate men, women and children into the 'science' of communism ?

The new rulers under Stalin's murderous decrees set up schooling bodies to teach the new faith to the people all over Russia. Children at early age were taken away from their parents to be educated by the state. Youth organisations sprang up everywhere under a variety of names to instil the wisdom of Marx's philosophy. New talent was recruited on huge scale to write books and articles and even poems to explain and eulogise the communist creed. Vast quantities of second rate propaganda stuff were printed and sold in foreign countries at throw-away prices. Anyone suspected of disloyalty to communism was either 'liquidated' or deported to Siberia. Numberless innocent people suffered hideously on this account in Stalin's infamous regime. Loyalty to communism was synonymous with loyalty to the state as the two were supposed to be inseparable. With much enthusiasm the Russians commenced their wholly needless attack on Islam in the Muslim republics of the south. Mosques were forcibly closed down. Madarsahs attached to them were abolished. Teaching and reading the holy book (holy Quran) was forbidden. Arabic as the key language of Islam was outlawed. The written scripts of their native languages were proscribed and Latin script was introduced instead. This was cultural geonocide with a vengeance.

In what way was this essential to the economic structure of the new system ? We fail to see any trace of sense in all this. As Karl Marx in his sole wisdom had decided to outlaw religion as being archaic in view of his materialist philosophy, he decreed war on religion as a necessary complement of his brand of communism. There are forms of materialism which permit old religions to survive without interference. But, unfortunately, Marx lacked imagination, though he was a man of genius without doubt. He focussed most of his attention on the advanced industrialised states of western Europe where, in his time, religion appeared to be a disintegrating force. And

in excess of zeal he appears to have thought that doing away with religion would be a logical thing to do. He forgot that communism might not sprout in western Europe, which it failed to do up to date. Now, of course the question does not arise.

It did not occur to this highly mercurial scholar that it is always wise to have as few enemies as possible when one initiates schemes of reform or wholesale (revolutionary) change. To enlist as much support as may be feasible and to neutralise as many forces as possible is elementary common sense. There is every reason to believe that had Lenin and Stalin and others ignored Christianity and Islam in their vast territories, it would have earned them the gratitude of millions of people. In fact wisdom lay in seeking indirect alliance with them and, with benefit of hindsight, it can be said, that the gain would have been that of the rulers. On the contrary Lenin and Stalin did the exact opposite, alienating millions of living souls.

Force has not succeeded in making honest conversion to a new faith or a new ideology. It is in the nature of force to repel and to evoke hatred and anger. Whether in politics or in religion, force has failed to produce enduring results. Moral conviction and opinion demands freedom to understand and to accept or reject. Religion as an institution has been with man from the earliest times and chances of its total disappearance are extremely weak. It will remain as its place is in men's hearts and minds. Men may play dirty tricks with the fundamentals of religion in general, as they have done too often. But they cannot kill it. Men play monkey tricks with the demands of religion and then blame it for its alleged inefficacy.

The Muslim Republics of the region which formerly was called Cinese Turkistan is the home of ancient Turkick and

Mongol races. In the times of Islam's past ascendancy, Samarkand and Bokhara etc. were famous seats of religious learning. The Czars did not meddle in their internal affairs, saving themselves much bother. But their communist successors broke their word which guaranteed their internal autonomy as the price of their invaluable help during the Russian civil war (1917-21). They contributed mightily during the German war of 1941-45. What did they get in return ? Stalin exiled the entire Muslim populace of one Muslim republic to Siberia. Half the population perished on the way and the rest got lost in the frozen wastes of that harsh region. Any comment on this will be unnecessary.

Despite all its efforts the late USSR failed to erase religion from the minds of a strikingly large number of men and women. This equally applies to the satellite states of eastern Europe. We need not go into the reasons of this, but it shows that even total 'penalisation' depending on force is no guarantee of success.

No wonder there were few genuine communists in Russia whereas the vast majority had no faith in it.

IV

State ownership of land was a vital part of the communist ideology. It was one of the pillars of socialism in general. So it was unavoidable for the enforcement of communism that all land should belong to the state. There was no mystery in this proposition. It arose simply from the observed fact that large tracts of land under a single owner could be made to yield much greater produce per unit than was possible when the land was owned and cultivated by many farmers. Nobody could deny this, But Russia, like the whole of Asia, was dotted with millions of small farms cultivated and, in some cases, owned, by small farmers (tenants) and peasant proprietors.

As everywhere else, there were also some few big landlords holding large and rich estates. Most of them were parasites, absentee landowners who did nothing to deserve a living. They were the cream of a dying feudal order. In India (undivided) too this class of leisured aristocracy flourished until abolished after 1947 while it is still a dominant force in Pakistan.

The abolition of the high and low class peasantry was a formidable task which Stalin decided to tackle with characteristic savagery.

The resistance which Stalin's officials encountered from the peasants was strong. The top class estate owners were to be unmercifully eliminated. Probably the absentee sub-class living in cities were able to escape total annihilation. Those who were on their estates met a sad end. Then came the relatively well-to-do peasants who were called 'Kulaks'. They were fairly numerous and their resistance to forcible seizure of and eviction from their lands created a problem for Stalin. His butcher's mind saw only one solution : shoot the lot of them. Eventually the man who performed this 'mission' was the man called Dzherzhensky. He demanded and got absolute powers of life and death. He spared none of the kulak class : nor was he less merciless in dealing with poorer tenants and farmers who ranked below the luckless kulaks. They too stiffly resented and where possible, opposed confiscation. The result was a blood bath unexampled in history. It is estimated that no less than six to seven million people perished in this essential exercise of communising the land. Stalin loaded the hero of this glorious achievement with honours. Moscow boasts a square after Dzherzhensky's name.

The consequences of this tragic event were grave and lasting. Famine stalked the land. For the army foodgrain was

seized at the point of the gun, making matters worse. Labourers were recruited from rural and urban areas to cultivate the land and do all what a seasoned farmer always did. These paid and mostly inexperienced labourers were no substitutes for the professional kulaks and tenants who were massacred in the name of Marxism. Nor had they any interest in the result of their half-hearted labours. They were there only for their wages.

Neither they knew even the ABC of agriculture which, after all, is a highly skilled profession. Generations of farmers had given their life-blood to their farms, making them yield as much produce as was possible in the circumstances. They were a priceless asset which should have been valued. But Karl Marx was a product of urban culture. He knew next to nothing about rural economy and its problems. Lenin too had little of the rural element in him. Stalin had none of the instincts of a normal human being. All these seemingly remote factors combined to produce one of the most blood stained episodes in the long blood soaked history of man.

Speaking in general terms, it would not be wrong to say that collectivisation of land undermined the foundation of the communist state system in the former USSR. It made agriculture a perennial failure in the Soviet Union. A population of more than two hundred and fifty souls could not subsist on starvation diet. From the early days of marxism, the socialist state was obliged to import foodgrains, mostly from their hated enemy the USA, upon which was to fall the mantle of leadership of the capitalist world. Certainly this was not a situation one could relish if one had even a grain of self-respect. But the communist scoffs at such bourgeoisie notions. It does not seem likely that anyone realised at any time during the late USSR's existence that its foundation rested on the quicksand of a failed agriculture which could undo the state itself in the long run.

We may pause for a moment to reflect on this grim episode of socialist history. It will not be right to put it down to the debit side of communism, for the simple reason that it was Stalin with his lust for human blood which was the principal cause of what happened. He had steeled his heart to the imposition of collectivised agriculture whatever the cost. Any other man in his place could not have gone ahead with the scheme in the face of such resistance, at high speed. What was Stalin's doing cannot be charged to communism's account. After all there was no earthly reason why the thing could not be done in stages. What is more, was Karl Marx's common sense proposition not capable of being amended to save millions of very precious lives ? We recall Burke's warning against drastic schemes of social change (Vide *Reflections On The Revolution in France*) which might imperil human lives. Schemes are meant for men and not men for schemes.

In this connection we may remember the very different handling of this problem by Maoze Dong and his associates. Certainly they too killed a large number of men in villages but there was no wholesale massacre of millions of unarmed men who only wanted to keep their lands. Mao cared for peasants with whose support he had defeated Chiang and emerged victorious the sole ruler of the new China. The result was that the professional class of farmers was saved. That is one important reason why chinese agriculture has not been a failure. On the contrary, it has raised productivity so much that China is feeding a billion people from the same land. (India, without land nationalisation, is feeding over eighty crores of people.) Pakistan is still feudal but feeds a population grown from four crores to about eleven crores.

The basic fault of all communists has been that they exalted Marx's ideas and opinions to the position of a religion.

They are treated as though they were sacred. To this must be attributed many pitfalls encountered by communists in implementing Marx's doctrine. Marx was not an original thinker. His philosophic ideas were in part an elaboration of Hegel while his economic thinking rested greatly on Ricardo's views. And his economic propositions have not been accepted even by economists who favoured communism. But Lenin and those who came under his influence were too highly reverent where Marx was concerned. This failure to assess Marx's propositions in the light of reason and reality resulted in trying to fit the facts to the theory and not the theory to the facts. All such misconceived attempts usually fail sooner or later. Marx was not a prophet inspite of his vanity. That is what his admiring followers forgot with consequences which only now have begun to appear in stark clarity.

As Sir Alexander Gray noted, Marx's edition of socialism was narrow and devoid of universality. Earlier socialist visions were catholic but Marx imported hate and intolerance and malevolence into his model. (The Development Of Economic Doctrine, 1980.p.312.)

There is no doubt that rulers of the former Soviet Union disastrously bungled on the issue of socialisation of land in their attempt to create a Marxian state and society. No less clear is the fact that it were the executors of policy who were at fault and not so much the policy itself.

V

Brezhnev was the last effective ruler of the late Soviet Union who died in 1982. His successor Andropov was sick man and died of an operation for kidney failure in 1984. After him the man who ascended the throne was Chernenko whose health was poor and he died in 1985. Then the usual secret internal struggle and manovuring began. Although Mikhail

Gorbachev was relatively less known and his management of farming work in 1978-81 had been a failure—a fall of grain harvest from 230 million tons to 155 million tons—yet he was backed by the influential and senior leader Andrei Gromykov, a sort of elder statesman. Gorbachev was thus elected as the next ruler of the mighty empire of communist Russia. His elevation to the highest office marked a radical but less noticed shift in basic policies of the then Soviet Union.

Till Leonid Brezhnev there had been continuity of policy both in internal and external affairs. The harsh regimentation of society had remained tight though less severe than in Stalin's time it had continued both in principle and practice. Concentration (correction) camps and torture and summary trials and executions and exile to Siberia, though softened and less common, were not officially rescinded. The state of the overall economy continued to deteriorate badly. Agricultural failure with huge grain deficits seems to have been accepted as a normal feature of Soviet life. Strict secrecy of these facts from the public went on unabated. The cold war was a necessary part of Soviet foreign policy despite its ruinous financial cost and no apparent utility. The United States was still the enemy to be shortly beaten in the world power game.

The economy was in shambles. Consumer goods were always in short supply. Wheat, maize, millet, flour, sugar, cooking oil, soap, bread, milk, butter, shirts, other wearing apparel, heaters, gas, cooking ranges, shoes, gas, hair oil, potatoes, biscuits, other bakery products, towels, textiles, wollen garments, motor cars, bicycles, simple household gadgets, electric household goods and a hundred other things of common need were mostly scarce for the citizens. But all these things and even articles of luxury were freely available to members of the Communist Party, Ministers of governments, senior government officials, privileged groups like

scientists, doctors, professors, eminent scholars, academicians personnel of the armed forces and their dependents, diplomats, special guests, factory managers, favoured writers and artists, and the like. Special supermarkets and luxury shops were earmarked for the exclusive use of these fortunate people. Doors and double doors of these special establishments were heavily guarded so that ordinary folk may not intrude. Special admission cards were supplied to those entitled to enter and buy. Black markets flourished in large cities including Moscow. Foreign currency was in great demand and highly valued. The US dollar was eagerly sought after and, with it, you could buy anything. The Soviet authorities connived at these illicit transactions. In the circumstances they were powerless to do anything else.

All these things were no secret from the luckless public. They had been probably conditioned to accept this situation as an unavoidable interruption on the long road to true socialism. In any case they had to endure what they could not resist or alter. The state propaganda machine was constantly busy instilling into their minds the unquestionable fact that a thing as precious as socialism could be reached only through stages and the noble Party members were dying to attain the ultimate position as quickly as possible. With no agency to expose the sinister hollowness of these prognostics, the poor, intellectually debased and materially impoverished citizens had no option but to accept this fraudulent tommyrot. There is perhaps no limit to being duped in closed societies endlessly.

It must be noted that what was called 'democratic centralism' in Marxian system was, in fact, one contributory factor in hastening the decline and decay of the economy as a whole. In simple terms all that this principle meant was that at the stage of discussion in committees one was free to express an

opinion, but once a final decision was taken by the body concerned, there was no right of criticism or independent opinion. One had only to obey the orders faithfully. Now, there was nothing new in this as it has been the accepted rule of all organisations, big or small. In fact without it no body can function properly at all. But this is not all. This so-called doctrine also laid down that all decisions in all matters had to be taken or modified by the central authorities and nobody lesser. Most of these authorities were located in or near Moscow. Normally even this sort of rule would be sensible provided due notice was taken of the numerous practical difficulties that always arise in implementing schemes of all kinds. In the resolution of such problems discretion is given to the officials at the spot. In other words a good deal of decentralisation of decision making was essential at the lower levels of authority so that progress is not held up due to quite unnecessary and wasteful delays.

This rule of common sense was disregarded by Lenin and his men. It was the authoritarian mind-set of Marxists which was at the bottom of all this growing malaise. Over the years officials, managers and other functionaries in mills and on farms developed the habit of passing on matters of all sorts to higher bosses for orders or for obtaining supplies and the like. Inevitably work was held up by these silly doctrinaire procedures.

Unfortunately there was also an abnormal amount of what is called red tape. In the Soviet Union there were too many official channels through which papers and files had to pass before the matter could reach the relevant higher authority. The suspicious Soviet mind could not trust men to do the jobs themselves instead of getting matters bogged up in reels of quite absurd bundles of papers. The British too had a passion for an enormous amount of paper work and still have. The

Americans are relatively much more free and, so, do a much better job in much lesser time in all practical matters, especially those of industry and agriculture.

We have given all these rather well known facts in order to show what a complex and intractable situation prevailed when Mikhail Gorbachev, the last ruler of erstwhile USSR, took up the reins of authority in 1985.

Between 1985 and 1988 nobody could divine that the USSR had entered the last fatal phase of its existence. Enemies and friends and the vast body of 'fellow travellers'—the opportunists and middle-roaders—had any serious suspicion that the late USSR was much nearer to eventual collapse, a historic event of vast proportions which was to alter the visible topography of the world politically. Mrs.Jeane Dixon of the USA too said nothing ; nor did the astrologers of the world prophecy the catastrophic fall. Politicians and the tribe of journalists too did not scan anything as a sign of approaching disaster in the first land of socialism.

Perhaps part of the key to the mysterious situation lay in the personality of Mikhail Gorbachev, namely some of his special qualities. Here are a few facts about his life. He was born in a village called Privolnoye (pop. 3000) in the south of the Russian Republic on March 21, 1931. That was the period of Stalin's brutal de-kulakisation or collectivisation of land. He was eleven years old when Hitler launched his attack on the USSR. At the age of twenty one he joined the local branch of the Komsomol in 1952. Nothing spectacular seems to have come out of this part of his career. He got married early in 1954. He has a daughter Irina who is married to a doctor. His family life was happy and uneventful, as, in communist countries consorts of rulers are never active in public affairs.

He is said to have been the best speaker in the Soviet Union after Lenin. He was also a great admirer of Lenin and a sincere communist. He graduated from the Law School of Moscow University. He was made the first Secretary of the Communist Party of a district called Starvopole, a distinction by no means unusual. Somehow he managed to travel—all over Europe, thus observing personally the state of economies both in communist and capitalist countries. He also saw his own sprawling continent—the then USSR—from Murmansk to kamchatka, meeting and chatting with town folk, shop keepers, factory workers and managers, traders, teachers and farm people. This gave him true information about the general condition of the people in various regions of the erstwhile USSR. It is probable that his impressions were tinged with sadness and shame. He disliked interference from Moscow in the internal affairs of his own part of Russian Republic. This was a trait at variance with the habit of top rulers as well as the requirements of the Marxist system. Unlike his predecessors, he had a warm concern for the peoples' woes and welfare, an ideological redundancy in official attitudes, Was it not enough that people enjoyed the supreme benefit of belonging to the world's first socialist (Marxist) state in history ? That kind of emotional vanity was supposed to do duty for all manners of remedies of grave shortages of all kinds and for building a socialist society. In due course he was elected (or nominated) as a Politburo member.

(TIME, Jan. 4, 1988.)

From this slim sketch no serious deduction can be made about the qualities of leadership of Gorbachev as a ruler of the world's most repressive and authoritarian state. But it is certain that he did *not* conform to the standard pattern set by his predecessors. For one thing, he appears to have believed that the over-riding concern of the (Soviet) state should be the wellbeing and welfare of the people. His predecessors, on the

other hand, regarded the building up of socialism as their foremost duty. Gorbachev had seen the condition of all sorts of people in his vast country with the eyes of a sympathetic human being. And what he saw probably distressed him in a degree not approved in official doctrine. Things like distress and apathy and lack of affluence did not seriously bother the rulers as long as the huge apparatus of police surveillance and police terror remained intact. The new ruler was apparently convinced that their economy had literally collapsed and needed to be rapidly unshackled and disengaged from the huge strangling mass of policies and procedures rooted in the heavy-handed centralism which was the cornerstone of the communist state system. In this there was no room for devolution of decision making authority. From Lenin down to Brezhnev this sort of thing was taboo in theory and practice. Gorbachev, on the contrary, thought that the economy could not be saved except by radical departure from the accepted practice. And in a diseased economy there lay the seeds of catastrophe and collapse. Once that stage was reached there was no knowing how the super-structure could be saved or even salvaged.

It is doubtful if Gorbachev really went that far in his perception of the formidable task and difficulties he and his government faced. Yet he does not appear to shy away from the unavoidable necessity of seeking and accepting non-communist solutions to the intractable problems created by an unrealistic philosophy. Facts including economic facts are not to be denied or ignored except at grave peril to civil society as a whole. But Gorbachev wanted to adopt such solutions while not compromising or contravening communist prescriptions. The socialist doctrine had to be married to capitalist remedies. Could this be done so that the sanctity and the prestige of Marxist communism did not suffer serious damage ?

As far as can be surmised from scantily known facts, that was Gorbachev's dilemma. It was like trying to square the circle. It is no more than a surmise we make in the light of events of the last two years. What the exact position was may be less exact or clear-cut. Yet one has to try to reconstruct the facts from the confused mass of data gathered largely by interested reporters and unscrupulous media men.

Gorbachev was also keen on restoring some resemblance of what the bourgeoisie theorists call 'legitimacy' in the political aspect of Soviet society. In plain words this meant exposing the working of the secretive state to the public—the vulgar masses whom Marx distrusted and extolled at the same time. Now was the time to make this unheard-of change. At the same time he knew that fundamental 'restructuring' of the state was also a compulsive necessity. From these perceptions were born the unorthodox ideas enshrined in 'glasnot' and 'perestroika'—terms which in practice were to start the irresistible process of the astonishing fall of the (former) USSR and of Gorbachev himself.

Probably these 'reforms' were either too sudden or too liberal for the long suppressed and untrained masses. It was like removing the lid suddenly from a cauldron which unexpectedly boils over. Whatever analogy one might give, the fact remains that a sort of volcano seemed to have exploded in the body—politic. For this destabilising event Gorbachev seems to have been unprepared. In fact he was not the right type of man for the job demanded by the new uncontrollable situation. A situation resembling this had not existed in Russia since communism was established.

The tragedy of many reformers is that they are half-hearted in their enterprises. In this case, Gorbachev wanted a modest dose of capitalist re-orientation while retaining the

'basics' of Marxism. That is how he began. This was an invitation to failure and, where the initial steps in reform end in failure, there can be no chance of ultimate success, after derevolutionary, complicated, untried and hazardous innovations are brought in to derail one system and instal its opposite. To be sure, the transition from socialism to capitalism was a unique anti-climax in the history of man. To be more precise, there could not be a market which was nominally, or half, free. All industries had to be de-nationalised ; but where were the new customers and how was this to be done ?

A free economy cannot co-exist with communist controls and strangling regulations. And yet Gorbachev was perhaps not clear about this elementary fact ; or, maybe he was unready for it. He wanted the cures of the free market without the total dismantling of the marxian economy. Competition, uncontrolled prices—which meant much higher prices—uneven supplies of certain category of goods and shortage of other, to begin with were part of the new process. Freedom within an economy cannot depend on the will of any one top man. Communist dictators seem naturally allergic to this bitter fact.

Very huge sums are needed when industries are decontrolled and this has to be non-government money. Only foreign tycoons and mega-corporations could enter such a field. But too much politics influences these men as it is bound to do when an enemy state is on the way to economic collapse. Besides, in such a state of affairs one can hardly be sure that the anti-communist change will not be undone by some one from the Army or the Party. It takes quite some time for such changes to stabilise and to generate a climate of real confidence. An economy of the size of that of the late USSR also requires massive financial help from foreign governments. Only the USA, Japan and Germany could help ; but it is easy

to talk about it than to do it. Too many considerations arise for such governments which complicate matters vastly. Japan has a sore problem with Russia over some islands seized by the USSR when the USA had already defeated Japan by dropping the atomic bombs on its cities. The Russians have stiffly refused to return the islands. No wonder the Japanese are unwilling to oblige on economic issues.

On political reforms too Gorbachev was less clear whether to grant full liberty or only marginal concessions. His anxiety to preserve the core of the system along with genuine democratisation in easy instalments could well be understood, but in such difficult matters, compromises between liberty and its denial are just not possible. Hesitant steps only do harm. The political unfreeze is far more visible and therefore, it is not easy to snatch it away, or to dilute liberty already conceded except by men or the stamp of Stalin. And Gorbachev was no Stalin or even his shadow. He made noises to show that he was determined to keep all powers in the Party's hands, a thing which the amazing surge of public opinion and sentiment had made nearly impossible. Liberty after suppression is like strong wine. You cannot drink it and not want more. If you don't give it, people will seize it.

From this brief outline of facts and conditions, one can judge how difficult and uncertain and perilous the situation was in the late USSR at the time of its sensational break-up. It also lists the unfitness of the man at the helm of affairs; though, to be sure, this is clear from the crazy unwinding of actual history before our very eyes. And the unwinding process is still going on with possibilities of disasters not foreseen yet. Not only men but their unwieldy systems also are on trial.

VI

We can now briefly mention the apparent causes of the failure of communism in the late Soviet Union. This is no more than a tentative and not implausible statement which can be inferred from recent history. It will be years later when historians will be in a much better position to judge cause and effect and to correlate events in the broader perspective of history much of which is still in the making. In general terms, the main causes of the failure of the Marxist communist system may be said to be the following : (1) The persistent failure of the economy. Neither industry nor agriculture was a success. Only heavy industry producing the requirements of the armed forces, including nuclear weapons, was able to meet the demands made on it. Also the prestigious space exploration programmes, including earth orbiting satellites, were successful—but only at the expense of basic public needs. (2) An alienated, dissatisfied and long suffering public: There is a limit beyond which even a heavily suppressed and deluded public cannot endure inhuman tyranny. A citizenry made incapable of loyalty cannot make its normal contribution to the state and society in times of dire peril. They cannot be counted as an asset. (3) The ex-Soviet Union lived under self-imposed conditions of isolation from the rest of the non-communist world. It created a block of its own, but all its members were quite poor and dependent on it. How could they come to its rescue in its hour of need ? (4) Anyone undertaking a critical audit of its economy, especially its expenditure will be amazed at its insane extravagance. It was doubtless very much beyond its means. How long could this go on ? (5) The communists, under Lenin's inspiration, treated Marx's system as sacred religion. This created the new fantastic crimes called 'deviation' and 'revisionism', though they were no more than honest amendments and reasonable amendments made by leading communists. Marxism was

made a dogma not open to correction and improvement. A substantially flawed doctrine was tried to be fastened to unfavourable facts. As facts could not bend more than they did, it was for the theoretical propositions to bend or break.

At the risk of some repetition, we might recapitulate the causes of the 'fall' of communism now. These are, as we said before, no more than plausible deductions from the facts of history before our gaze. These are the items :

- (1) Failed agriculture—the gift of Stalin's collectivisation,
- (2) No medium industry and no consumer goods.
- (3) No sincere large-scale acceptance of communism by the bulk of the masses.
- (4) Denial of incentives to workers of all categories.
- (5) Insane pursuit of the silly ideal of a classless society.
- (6) The new class of highly privileged folk, duplicating a communist version of the cursed bourgeois.
- (7) Wasteful expenditure on (1) ostentatious space projects ; (2) Too liberal aid and soft loans on unrealistic scale ; (3) Free supply of weapons to worthless states ; (4) Nuclear weapons of no utility but at ruinous cost ; (5) A huge peace time standing army ; (6) Cheap subsidised communist literature of no effect ; (7) Ill-conceived competition with the USA which was far ahead in everything ; (8) And the costly drain of the Warsaw Pact armies.

Is Communism Dead ?

There can be no doubt that the fall and disintegration of the former Soviet Union dealt a fatal blow to the state-system of Marx's communism and to the basic ideas of communism itself. It was a state founded on the principles of an ideology framed by some ambitious men for the alleged benefit of mankind when it got enmeshed in the so-called intractable complexities of capitalist industrialism. When the Soviet system failed, it is natural to assume that the principles which it represented in concrete form also were refuted by the facts of history. Apparently that seems to be the general consensus of opinion among most peoples of the world, not excluding many ex-communist states.

In the beginning of this essay we pointed out that a distinction could be made between the fall of an empire and the failure of the ideology on which it was founded. But, in view of some evidence we tentatively opined that the fall of the Soviet Empire signified the failure of communism or socialism itself. That view is necessarily provisional as all contemporary opinion so close to the event is bound to be. Can we say what elements or ingredients of communism have been shown as untenable ? It seems that the following conclusions can reasonably be drawn from the communist debacle :-

(1) Men are by nature partly good and partly evil. That is the ineradicable quality of human nature. In rare cases only are men found who have marked excess of one (good) or the other (evil). Part of human traits are inherited. The communists hold a contrary view which is false. They hold that only institutions are bad and they alone produce the evils from which mankind has always suffered. Abolish exploitation and all will be well. This view has been demonstrated as erroneous. Men are not and cannot be angels. They cannot frame perfect institutions. In their hands the best of institutions will be debased over a period of time. Imperfect men cannot make flawless institutions. Some corrupting element inheres in men and it can only be diminished in some degree. All recorded and unrecorded history bears out this ugly fact of life. Socialism, communism and Marxism propagated ideas contrary to these facts and their preaching has been disproved. Marxists failed to produce one single man or woman in their socialist laboratory who could be dubbed the 'new' man or woman.

(2) Human behaviour is vitally influenced by that much abused thing called the profit motive. Even Soviet Russia recognised this fact by granting much better facilities to

scientists, doctors, engineers, research scholars, academicians and intellectuals. They received much higher emoluments and status and were a highly privileged class. All this was an inducement to make them perform better. In their place in the new order this was the extra 'profit' to attract and keep high talent glued to work and duty. What comparison was possible between them and the plain workers ? Lure of money, position and excellent privileges and not only pure sense of duty were the attractions for these men. For them it was a variant of the hated 'profit motive.' Otherwise, why not depend only on the call of duty ?

(3) Socialist doctrine condemned private ownership of property. This notion was as silly as it was unpracticable. Only certain categories of 'property' were better fitted to be held by the state. Even about them the experience on nationalisation of certain industries in advanced capitalist states has proved sobering and disillusioning. Private versus public ownership remains very much a controversial issue. The balance of advantage does not belong clearly to public ownership

(4) No economy anywhere can function with optimum advantage without a free market to channel its various operations. This is a bitter truth communists all the world over have been obliged to accept. There are cranks among Marxists who might cling to the opposite dogma ; but they hardly count.

(5) The idea of a classless society has exerted a powerful attraction on intellectuals of all brands. Nothing could be farther from realisable reality. Utopian ideas are of little value in actual affairs of life. In the late Soviet Union there was not even a pretence of reduction of income differentials. In fact levels of income varied far more than in many advanced capitalist states. In Scandanavia society was far better

oriented in the direction of economic parity in incomes, and there was great deal of liberty consistent with socialist practice in important matters.

There are and have been privileged groups in all societies of the world. As you ascend from the crude to the refined communities, you will notice more and more group distinctions based on money, political power, status, religion, profession etc. Social progress seems mixed up with complexity of the social order and any external attempt to rescind it can only retard cultural advance. Privilege arises from unequal endowments and abilities of men. Superior talent will produce better success ; and as long as the moral law is not infringed dangerously, it will be best to let it have free play. To stifle the results of talent in pursuit of equality would be suicidal.

(6) In socialist (and communist) thinking too heavy reliance is placed on force and coercion as means of social change.

Certainly organised society is made possible by placing the monopoly of force and its use in the hands of what is called government. Normally established orders resist change for obvious reasons. Those who want and advocate serious change in the established arrangements desire to possess means of using force to achieve their ends. In most cases this does not succeed and many a cherished dream lies on the scrap heap of history. In some few cases prospects appear promising. In all such cases the tendency is to run to extremes and seek in indiscriminate use of force or coercion an effective means of achieving the desired change.

What is not realised is that internal reconstruction of society is a matter requiring great care and caution. As Burke warned, it is easy to destroy than to rebuild. Force and

coercion are necessary evils and far more liable to be abused. In fact what is erected on the base of force and fraud is likely to last only for short durations. The tragedy of men is that, irrespective of intentions, what is built on excessive force is bound to be relatively short-lived. Lenin and Marx by temperament were determined to reconstruct society on socialist (communist) lines by the exclusive use of force. And Lenin's greatness is said to lie precisely in this fact ! Is it any wonder that Lenin's handiwork proved a perishable item ?

I

Is socialism (or communism) dead ? This is not easy to answer with any semblance of finality. One can answer it according to one's prejudice and presumption.

It is clear that socialism as a live *disturbing* force does not seem durable. Around the communist core of ideas no serious movement is likely to arise for the foreseeable future. The danger of revolutionary upheavals can be said to have lessened substantially. But the socialist *ideal* will doubtless live on, inspiring countless people all over the globe. Critics, admirers and intellectuals will continue to produce amended editions of the original. Men and women will continue to argue about what caused the giant empire and its philosophy to fall so disastrously. That is one way to keep an issue alive, at least academically.

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By the Same Author

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

An Explanatory Essay

ALI JAWAD

Rs. 250

Development is a dynamic concept. Not only it changes in space and time but has different meanings for different nations, ethnic groups and people. In fact, there is hardly any unanimity on the meaning of development among thinkers and decision makers. The only thing on which every one agrees is that economic development is necessary for the survival of mankind on the earth surface. Every one wants it, although in his own image, and perhaps in his own way.

The author in the present book defines development as a process of over all societal changes. He has adopted an anthropocentric approach, placing man at the central point of this process of socio-cultural transformation. How the process of development has accelerated after the Second World War, especially in the developing countries has been highlighted in the book. The consequent social transformation and emergence of new values at the cost of simple style of living of the economically less developed societies have also been examined systematically with suitable examples from some of the developing countries, especially from India, Pakistan, Argentina and Tanzania. The author has also discussed, how the cultural ethos, socio-cultural imperatives, technological advancement, and general and regional issues determine the levels of economic development at the macro, meso and micro levels.

The complex issues of economic development and socio-cultural implication of rapid economic development have also examined at length in the present essay. Born out of Mr. Ali Jawad's rich administrative, planning and varied experience in India and Pakistan and his indepth study of the available literature on social and physical sciences, the present book is addressed to the laymen and women, who if they benefit even so little will have repaid the efforts of writing them. The author has underscored the point that development should be economically viable, socially acceptable, and environmentally sustainable and therefore the book has more than academic value for the planners, teachers and students alike.

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