

I Take a Fresh Look

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(First of a Series)

LIFE AND THEORY

Was it Goethe's Faust who said it? Whoever uttered it first, the thought is still vital, potent and marvelously fruitful: Theory, my friend, is grey but the tree of life is forever green.

Is not this thought especially vital and fruitful for our own time?

The period of peaceful co-existence and competition now being born in; much travail is bound to release a host of new currents, tendencies and forces in all spheres of social life. In fact, it is already doing so. What are they? What is their nature in each country and under different social systems? These are big questions that must be studied and answered.

How will these new currents and tendencies affect life in the capitalist countries? How in the socialist countries? What will this mean for the future of the American people?

These questions require a fresh look at life and theory—a fresh and thorough application of our Marxist-Leninist theory to the study of everything socially new and significant. Such objective scientific study will give a far more complete and true picture of life than we now possess. We will see more clearly the direction life is taking. Marxist-Leninist theory will become richer, more potent for the cause of social progress, closer to life, hence more profoundly true.

May certain theoretical propositions emerge modified or basically changed? New scientific ideas born? Not only possible but highly probable. There would be something wrong with a fresh look that failed to produce some new, significant theoretical ideas to enrich Marxist-Leninist science.

Here let me take issue with a point of view altogether too simple, naive and non-scientific. This is the idea that the only way to take a fresh look at life is to leave Marxist-Leninist theory alone for the moment and let life speak for itself.

How can one gain a scientific view of the new that is emerging, without the aid of scientific



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theory? Without standing firmly on the positions of such theory and applying its methods? And the only such theory we know is Marxist-Leninism.

Of course it is possible to view social developments without the application of Marxist-Leninist theory. Most current views in our country are of this kind and many of them contain something valuable. But could a Marxist-Leninist call these views consistently scientific? Do they give a completely true picture of social life and of its direction?

Then, there is the idea that all the theoretical propositions of Marxism-Leninism are sound and fully adequate for the entire present historical epoch. Consequently — it is reasoned — no theoretical modifications or changes can be expected or justified by a fresh look at life. Perhaps changes in certain theoretical formulations but no modification of substance; adjustment of old policies but strictly within the limits of established theoretical propositions.

This, too, is a naive and non-scientific point of view. How can one gain a truly objective and scientific view of new, unprecedented social developments if one excludes any significant changes in one's theoretical positions. Inevitably, one will fail to see much that is being born, that is really new and significant.

And to the extent that new developments are seen, their full theoretical meaning will inevitably be missed.

And can new policies be adequate when the theoretical propositions on which they are based are themselves no longer adequate?

Historically our epoch remains what it has been: that particular chunk of history in which the socialist system is supplanting the capitalist system. But this very process is bringing forth new ways, roads and forms. The period of peaceful coexistence and competition, for which objective conditions are ripe, promises to bring forth new stages in the development in the socialist countries and, in a qualitatively different way in the capitalist countries. New nations emerging from colonial status are finding new ways of bypassing capitalism and advancing towards socialism.

Theoretical problems of the first magnitude are bound to arise, already are arising. Only the Marxist-Leninist theory is capable of formulating and meeting these problems with scientific consistency and adequacy. Hence, our theory must necessarily become enriched with new propositions while some of the old ones may have to be modified or changed.

Leaving Marxist-Leninist theory alone for the moment may produce conclusions of a revisionist nature, but it is not wise to begin by pasting revisionist labels on such points of view.

Likewise, excluding substantial theoretical changes may produce conclusions of a dogmatic and doctrinaire nature, but here too the use of labels will not be wise.

The first important job is to seek out the truth about the new problems and the scientific answers. In the course of this it will become clear that the two points of view with which issue has been taken here are not in full accord with the principles and spirit of Marxism-Leninism. The choice of conclusion will then not be too difficult and most of us will make the right one.

Tomorrow: The Party Crisis.