

## Liberating the Forces of Production, Soviet Style

Roland Boer

2020

Liberating the forces of production is usually understood to be Deng Xiaoping's signature contribution to the Marxist tradition. Not at all. It goes back to Marx and Engels, but also appears clearly during the immensely creative 1930s in the Soviet Union.

The following comes from Stalin's important report to the 17th congress in 1934. He initially addresses mistaken conceptions concerning equality under socialism, before focusing on the need to liberate the forces of production in an all-round way:

These people evidently think that socialism calls for equalisation, for levelling the requirements and personal, everyday life of the members of society. Needless to say, such an assumption has nothing in common with Marxism, with Leninism. By equality Marxism means, not equalisation of personal requirements and everyday life, but the abolition of classes, i.e., a) the equal emancipation of all working people from exploitation after the capitalists have been overthrown and expropriated; b) the equal abolition for all of private property in the means of production after they have been converted into the property of the whole of society; c) the equal duty of all to work according to their ability, and the equal right of all working people to receive in return for this according to the work performed (socialist society); d) the equal duty of all to work according to their ability, and the equal right of all working people to receive in return for this according to their needs (communist society). Moreover, Marxism proceeds from the assumption that people's tastes and requirements are not, and cannot be, identical and equal in regard to quality or quantity, whether in the period of socialism or in the period of communism.

There you have the Marxist conception of equality.

Marxism has never recognised, and does not recognise, any other equality.

To draw from this the conclusion that socialism calls for equalisation, for the levelling of the requirements of the members of society, for the levelling of their tastes and of their personal, everyday life—that according to the Marxist plan all should wear the same clothes and eat the same dishes in the same quantity—is to utter vulgarities and to slander Marxism.

It is time it was understood that Marxism is an enemy of equalisation. Already in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* Marx and Engels scourged primitive utopian socialism and termed it reactionary because it preached “universal asceticism and social levelling in its crudest form.” In his *Anti-Dühring* Engels devoted a whole chapter to a withering criticism of the “radical equalitarian socialism” put forward by Dühring in opposition to Marxist socialism.

“... The real content of the proletarian demand for equality,” said Engels, “is the demand for the abolition of classes. Any demand for equality which goes beyond that, of necessity passes into absurdity.”

Lenin said the same thing:

“Engels was a thousand times right when he wrote that to conceive equality as meaning anything beyond the abolition of classes is a very stupid and absurd prejudice. Bourgeois professors have tried to make use of the concept of equality to accuse us of wanting to make all men equal to one another. They have tried to accuse the Socialists of this absurdity, which they themselves invented. But in their ignorance they did not know that the Socialists—and precisely the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels—said: Equality is an empty phrase unless equality is understood to mean the abolition of classes. We want to abolish classes, and in this respect we stand for equality. But the claim that we want to make all men equal to one another is an empty phrase and a stupid invention of intellectuals” (Lenin’s speech “On Deceiving the People with Slogans About Liberty and Equality,” Works, Vol. XXIV, pp. 293-9482).

Clear, one would think.

Bourgeois writers are fond of depicting Marxist socialism in the shape of the old tsarist barracks, where everything is subordinated to the “principle” of equalisation. But Marxists cannot be held responsible for the ignorance and stupidity of bourgeois writers.

There can be no doubt that this confusion in the minds of some Party members concerning Marxist socialism, and their infatuation with the equalitarian tendencies of agricultural communes, are exactly like the petty-bourgeois views of our Leftist blockheads, who at one time idealised the agricultural communes to such an extent that they even tried to set up communes in mills and factories, where skilled and unskilled workers, each working at his trade, had to pool their wages in a common fund, which was then shared out equally. You know what harm these infantile equalitarian exercises of the “Left” blockheads caused our industry.

A little later he elaborates on the need for socialism to abolish poverty (which would become part of the primary human right to economic wellbeing):

As for the argument that Bolshevik work and socialism are inconceivable without the existence of the poor, it is so stupid that it is embarrassing even to talk about it. Leninists rely upon the poor when there exist both capitalist elements and the poor who are exploited by the capitalists. But when the capitalist elements have been crushed and the poor have been emancipated from exploitation, the task of Leninists is not to perpetuate and preserve poverty and the poor—the conditions for whose existence have already been eliminated—but to abolish poverty and to raise the poor to a life of prosperity. It would be absurd to think that socialism can be built on the basis of poverty and privation, on the basis of reducing personal requirements and lowering the standard of living to the level of the poor, who themselves, moreover, refuse to remain poor any longer and are pushing their way upward to

a prosperous life. Who wants this sort of socialism, so-called? It would not be socialism, but a caricature of socialism. Socialism can be built only on the basis of a vigorous growth of the productive forces of society; on the basis of an abundance of produce and goods; on the basis of the prosperity of the working people, on the basis of a vigorous growth of culture. For socialism, Marxist socialism, means not the reduction of individual requirements, but their development to the utmost, to full bloom; not the restriction of these requirements or a refusal to satisfy them, but the full and all-round satisfaction of all the requirements of culturally developed working people.