

The Problem of Becoming

SOcialist philosophy is said to be, like that of Heraclitus, Hegel and Darwin, "dialectic," (see Engels' "Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science"), as contrasted with the non-evolutionary, rigid "metaphysical" systems. The poet Burns, too, writes dialectically when, in one of his songs written to excuse the unreliability of "fickle man" in love affairs (not woman, be it noted), he says that "Nature's mighty law is change."

According to Engels, the philosophy of change was first clearly enunciated by the ancient Greek, Heraclitus, in the words, all things flow. Under the form of "the problem of Becoming," this was the first philosophical question to arouse controversy, inasmuch as being persists; beings constantly change; they are born and they pass away. How can beings both persist and not persist? Reflection upon this, the chief metaphysical problem, gives rise to three systems; the types of all European philosophies—the Eleatic system; the system of Heraclitus; and the atomistic system, which, in the idealistic sense, was proclaimed by the Pythagoreans; in the materialistic sense by Leucippus and Democritus, and with a dualistic turn by Anaxagoras. The term "Eleatics" comes from those thinkers who formed a "school" in the Grecian town of Elea. The Eleatics maintained that being is everything; according to Heraclitus, change is everything and being or permanence is only an illusion; the monadists and atomists held the conciliatory view that both permanence and change exist—permanence in the beings, perpetual change in their relations. The Eleatics denied becoming; Heraclitus worshipped it; the atomists professed to explain it. We Socialists, as above said, support the Heraclitian attitude.

Heraclitus was an Ephesian and because of his love of apparent, but not actual absurdities, was called the Obscure. He considered all bodies as transformations of one and the same element, which he sometimes calls fire (pyre), and sometimes warm breath (psyche) and which resembles either what physics formerly called caloric or modern chemistry calls oxygen. This original matter extends from the boundaries of the earth to the limits of the world. Everything that exists is derived from it and strives to return to it, everything is transformed fire; and conversely, every being may be and actually is, eventually changed into fire. His physics, says Prof. Weber, reminds one of the mechanical theory of heat of modern physics which also considers all organic life as a transformation of the sun's heat. Earth and solids are extinguished fire and will be rekindled afresh at the hour fixed by Fate. Universal life is an endless play of creation and destruction. Rest, standstill, that is, being, is an illusion of the senses.

But the perpetual flow of things is not an easy process, like the gliding of a brook over a bed of stones. Becoming is a struggle between contrary forces and opposing currents, and it is this continuous battle that produces all vegetable, animal and intellectual life on the face of the earth. This anticipates Darwinism. Everything arises from the strife of opposites. Organic life is produced by the male and the female; musical harmony by sharp and flat notes; sickness makes us appreciate health; exertion makes us value repose; without danger, no courage; without evil to overcome there would be no virtue. The animal lives the death of the vegetable; man lives the death of the animal; virtue lives the death of vice, and vice, the death of virtue. Hence good is a destroyed evil and evil is a vanished good; and because evil does not exist without the good nor the good without the evil, therefore evil is a relative good and good is a relative evil. Like being and non-being, good and evil disappear in the universal harmony. In all this drama of perpetual change, there is nothing stable in the eternal process but the Law which governs it and which neither gods nor men can modify.

Empedocles was also a later evolutionist who de-

rived his views on the origin of plants, animals, man, etc., from the interaction of Love and Discord, with Love as the principle of principles and Discord as its indispensable accomplice. The struggle between these two immaterial principles which unites and separates the elements, results in alternative periods of separation and periods of union as a fatal and eternal necessity. The modern expressions for Empedocles' principles of love and discord, are attractions and repulsion.

Our next philosopher, Hegel, (died 1831) is important as being the teacher whose methods Marx handled with "unsurpassed mastery in the service of Socialism." He was, however, with all his powers, an idealistic and not a materialistic thinker and also somewhat of a mystic, perhaps due to his original theological training. Marx was, therefore, as he said, compelled to upraise his philosophy from off its head and set it solidly, feet down again, on the ground; for with him, the origin and essence of the process of growth is not to be sought in the material forces, but in the logical idea, reason, the universal spirit, the absolute, or from the religious side, God. As Socialists largely follow and consider of importance the Hegelian theory of absolutism, that subject is further discussed.

In Schelling, Hegel's contemporary, things proceed from the absolute which, therefore, remains outside of things. In Hegel, the absolute is the process itself; it does not produce movement and life, it is movement, life, process and evolution. This movement has its law and its goal. Its law and its goal are not imposed upon the absolute from without; they are indwelling in it, they are the absolute itself. Now the law which governs both human thought and unconscious nature, is reason; the end at which things aim is also reason, but self-conscious reason. Hence the terms absolute and reason are the same. The absolute is reason, which becomes personified in man, after passing through the successive stages of inorganic and living nature. But reason is not, as Kant conceives it, the human understanding. It is the law according to which being in general is produced, constituted or unfolded; or rather, it is both a subjective faculty and an objective reality. It is in me, as the essence and type of my thought, and it is in the things as the essence and law of their evolution. The true philosophical method, the indwelling or dialectical method, is to leave thought to itself and to its own self-activity. The science which does all this is Logic, in the Hegelian sense of the word; and Hegel's logic is both what that subject is usually understood to be, and also what is called ontology—the part of metaphysics which treats of beings or existences.

The moving principle in Hegelian or Dialectical Logic is as follows: a contradiction is reconciled in a unity, it reappears in a new form only to disappear and reappear again until it is melted into the final unity. It therefore, repudiates the Aristotelian "principle of contradiction" according to which a thing cannot both be and not be. The common root of pure concepts is the notion of being which is at one and the same time the most elementary and the most exalted notion. Quality, quantity, proportion, phenomenon, action, are all models of being. All our concepts express modes of being, and hence are merely transformations of the idea of being. But how does being, which is everything, become anything else, and by virtue of what principle or inner force is it modified? The contradiction contained in being is this principle or force.

Being is the most universal notion and therefore, the poorest and emptiest. To be white, black, extended or good is to be something; but being, pure and simple, and without any limitation, is equal to non-being. Hence being is both itself and its opposite. If it were only itself, it would stay immovable and barren; and if it were merely nothing, it would stay equal to zero and would be likewise quite powerless and fruitless. Because being is both,

it becomes something, a different thing, everything. The contradiction contained in being is resolved in the notion of becoming or development, because becoming is both being and non-being (that which will be). The two contraries—being and nothing—which breed becoming are contained and reconciled in becoming. A new contradiction results which is taken up by a new combination and so on until the absolute idea is reached.

And in this continual process of becoming, Activity is the same as Reality. Nothing is real except what is active. Absolute rest does not exist; and because "reason alone is real," he concludes, conversely, that what is real is rational or, as condensed into his famous aphorism, "Everything which is real is reasonable, and everything which is reasonable is real." Reality as contrasted with mere possibility, becomes necessity; what is real is necessarily active. Activity, reality, and necessity are the same thing. A being exists insofar as it acts, and it acts insofar as it exists.

(To be continued)

THE GATES OF THE RUHR.

(Continued from page 1)

has seized upon the gates of the Ruhr and the Rhineland, has depreciated temporarily the value of assets which, surrendered by their German owners, either indirectly or directly, to the conqueror, the latter must pass over as guarantees for loans made to stabilise the franc and to balance the Budget.

The banking and money power of Britain and of America see in the possession of the industrial resources of Europe a means to their retention of control, economic and political, within their own capitalist societies. The industrialists of America and of Britain would either keep out of Europe or perpetuate the independence of Central European industry or, somehow, seize it for themselves by rescuing Germany with a loan guaranteed on her railways.

Interest fights interest, vertically and horizontally, in the hideous death-grapple of the European bourgeoisie. Should victory come to either or should they call it a draw and agree to recuperate their dissipated strength upon the spoils, the results will be calamitous not only to the blast furnace men and steel workers of Aberavon and of Middlesbrough, to the coke oven men and the miners of Durham and Yorkshire and South Wales, but, also, to the port employees of the Tyne and the Tees, the Humber, the Thames and the Bristol Channel, and the railway workers on all the British systems.

Antwerp and Rotterdam will become the inlets and outlets for the one great industrial region that capitalism will develop in Europe.

Nowhere is international preparedness so urgent a necessity as it is on the part of the workers in the ports and on the railways, in the mines and at the furnaces in Britain, Germany, Belgium, Holland and France. The facts are so obvious, the menace so palpable that to state them should be enough.

Yet on the industrial field as in the sphere of high politics where a Socialist Premier exchanges platitudes with a Capitalist Premier, the one "creating an atmosphere," the other guarding his position, what is being attempted to bring together transport workers, railway men, blast furnace men, steel workers and miners in a common and united front against a common and ever more united enemy?

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