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Pompiliu ALEXANDRU, Cristina DINU*

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Karl Marx – From Marxianism to Marxism

Pompiliu ALEXANDRU[1], Cristina DINU[2]*

Abstract

Firstly, this paper will define the two main concepts in the title "Marxianism and Marxism", because one of them, Marxism, is a term frequently met in the writings about Marx, while the other, namely Marxianism, designates the actual work of Marx. Secondly, the main objective of this paper is to observe the difference between the two terms with examples from Marx's work, his theories and the way they were applied by his followers, the twentieth century communists. And to narrow the area we will discuss only how the Marxianism was interpreted in Stalin's regime. We will see to what extent Marx's ideas were followed when applied in real life. In our research, we will see that we can talk about a degradation of Marx's ideas and that this degradation occurred gradually. They have been degraded with the passage of time and after going through the minds of others who changed his ideology in order to meet their own interests and ideas, as Stalin's ideology did. Regarding the results we expect from our research, we want to see if nowadays Marx can be held responsible for the extreme forms of twentieth century communism and, if not, what happened to the theory of Marx and most important how was it changed.

Keywords: Marxism, Marxianism, The Communist Manifesto, Stalin's ideology.

1. Introduction

Karl Marx remains one of the greatest thinkers of the XIX[th] century even if he had and still has objectors and critics, as any other thinker should have. The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the difference between

[1] Lecturer PhD., Valahia University, Târgoviște, Romania, pompiliualex@yahoo.com.
[2] Associate, Research Center in Political Science and Communication, Valahia University, Târgoviște, Romania, crissdinu11@yahoo.com.

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Corresponding Author: Cristina DINU
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Marxism and Marxianism base on what the two concepts mean and on how Marx's ideas were put in practice in Stalin's regime.

There are some important authors, like Hannah Arendt or Leszek Kołakowski, who have spoken about Marx and who brought important points of view regarding his theory and in this paper we will try to highlight their main ideas.

The tireless work that Marx had done throughout his whole life and the miserable conditions he had chosen to live in with his family, to achieve his goal of learning more about the working class, the proletariat, as he called it later, made Marx not only a theoretician of the ideas he presented in his works, but also a practitioner.

The development and expansion of capitalist rapports of production, which often generated overproduction crises, every 10, 12 years, industrialization that left people unemployed and, perhaps, what is the most important, the growing contrast between bourgeoisie and proletariat were the social-historical conditions that led to the Marxist philosophy.

Once we understand the theoretical foundations of Marxism, we will study what are the political results of theoretical Marxism - socialism and communism. Leszek Kolakowski and his Main Currents of Marxism will help us to reach this goal. The practical result of Marxism, who brought terrible results and formed what today is known as the left half of totalitarianism, meaning communism, will be analyzed in terms of Stalin's actions that took place during his long lasting tyranny.

2. Marxism and Marxianism

Marxism and Marxianism are terms usually used when discussing Marx's philosophy. Oxford Dictionary defines Marxism as "the political and economic theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, later developed by their followers to form the basis of communism" [1].

As we can see, the Oxford Dictionary also includes Marx and Engels' descendants under this name of Marxism, but as we will see in this paper, the followers of these two interpret Marxist theory, altering the essentials points of the philosophers' ideas. History speaks vividly about this, about the way in which later communism was applied by some of the greatest tyrants of contemporary political regimes, Lenin (Russia), Stalin (Soviet Union), Rákosi (Hungary), Jivkov (Bulgaria), Ceaușescu (Romania), Gomulka (Poland). In this paper we will only analyze Stalin's regime of terror. If this is Marxism, then, the question that comes next is: what is

Marxianism? The answer is that Marxianism is pure Marx. Marx's ideas, without interpretation, without change, are Marxianism.

And, because we work with important terms in our paper, we think it is important to see how communism is defined by Oxford Dictionary. Therefore, *communism* is a theory or system of social organization in which all property is owned by the community and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs [2]. Well, this is how the dictionaries define the communism, because, in theory, this is communism at least from one point of view. But maybe a correct definition should include, especially almost 30 years after the fall of communism, also the practice of this regime, not only the theory. And that is what we are trying to do in this paper: see how communism applied Marx and Engels' theory.

One of the most important changes that Marx made was to contradict Hegel theory. The theory with which Hegel revolutionized philosophy is his dialectics, which is reduced to three steps: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. But Hegel was applying this formula to the world of ideas, the only one where such concepts can work, according to Hegel. Karl Marx also adopted the diagram of Hegelian dialectic, but applied it to Reality. Hegel considered that the Being is the superior level from which one can start reaching out to matter, while Marx considers that from Reality you can build further and that people's purpose must be to find the happiness here and not in the world of ideas. The dialectic of Hegel's historical evolution will become, in Marx's thinking, the class struggle ideology. Through his dialectic, Hegel succeeded in eliminating the contingency, which resulted in the liberation of the spirit. For this reason, Leszek Kołakowski highlights in his work "Main Currents of Marxism" the way the philosopher sees the subject of freedom, because he considers that "liberty is of the Spirit as gravity is of the matter" [3].

But Hegel did not speak of liberty in the sense that we understand it today. He spoke about liberty as *being inside itself*, meaning the state in which the Spirit is not constrained by any objectivity from outside. And for the Spirit to become aware and understand his freedom, progress is needed. That is why Hegelian freedom is "the understanding of necessity," meaning the human spirit wants reconciliation with reality through understanding.

A new vision of humanity was born with Karl Marx, who considered humanity to be an Absolute itself, that is, supreme will and supreme force. Marx's early thinking highlighted his first revolutionary ideas that would change the way of humanity's thinking. If, until him, philosophy was generally critical, working only in the field of ideas, the German philosopher suggested a different idea about philosophy in his work, *The German Ideology*. This is why one of Marx's most famous quotes says: "Philosophers have

only interpreted the world in different ways, but it is important to change it." This is how philosophy of praxis appears, namely the philosophy of action.

Marx blames critical philosophy because it has the role of a judge and always places itself above man. The philosophy of praxis is more useful to humanity because it brings real solutions, while in critical philosophy, the theory prevails, and, therefore, there is a gap between ideas and people's world.

3. From Marx's theory to Stalin's regime

The main premise of our paper is that Stalinism is a modified form of Marxianism, and not a legitimate successor of it, how Stalin himself was trying to show through the formula Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism.

People say there is a long way from theory to practice, and this is what we try to demonstrate here; that the practice of communism is very different from the theory communism claims to be its foundation. And, for this, we must see "The Communist Manifesto", because this is the work of Marx in which we find the main ideas of his political theory.

The fundamental idea of the Manifesto is that economic production and the structure of society are the basis of the political and intellectual history of that era, which is the history of class struggles between exploited and exploiters. The work of Marx and Engels offers a short history of the bourgeoisie, showing the ups and downs of its path, in order to finally reach a simple conclusion, reducing the bourgeoisie to its economic aspect: „the bourgeoisie has stripped of their aura all activities that were until then venerable and viewed with humility. She turned the doctor, jurist, priest, poet, scientist into her workers."[4]

Then, it is important to note how Marx and Engels characterize the proletariat, gathering under this name an important part of society: „The lower strata of the middle class – the small-trade people, shopkeepers, retired tradesmen, handicraftsmen and peasants – sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialized skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production. Thus, the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population" [5].

This is the first important difference between Marx's ideas and the practice of communism, including Stalin's regime, because in vulgarized Marxianism, the proletarians were the class of employees. That is, to be part of the proletariat, one must have two characteristics: to be a worker and an

employee. This simple definition excludes peasants, who work the land, who are not employees of anybody, but live in misery because they have no means of production.

But, Lenin also has made some changes in Marx's theory and the most important is that he "(…) recourse to a novelty: the party is no longer the emanation of the working class, itself the carrier of revolutionary class consciousness, as it was in Marx and the Social Democrats; For Lenin the party consists of intellectuals, revolutionaries of a profession that bring revolutionary consciousness out of the working class."[5]. So, this shift of roles is the main cause of communist totalitarianism. We can say, therefore, that the degradation of Marxism began with Lenin, but the actual collapse of Marxism began with Stalin.

The second change that is visible in Marx's theory is linked to the press and citizens' liberty. The first thought that comes in people's mind when they talk about the totalitarian communism is the restriction of human rights and liberties, and one could certainly say that this is a main feature of communism. But when we return to theory, we discover that Marx was militating for the freedom of press saying that "Freedom of the press is far more justified than censorship, as it itself is an embodiment of the idea, freedom, a positive good, while censorship (...) is the weapon of a concept based on appearances against a concept based on the nature of things" [7]. Thus, Marx continues saying that censorship, like slavery, can never be justified, even if regulated by law.

Another misapplication of Marxist principles can be found in the work field. In the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" from 1844, also called Parisian manuscripts, Marx understands work as a natural change with nature, but also as a condition for all spiritual activity.

In other words, only through work can a connection be created between man and nature, because man is above all, a natural being. The fundamental role of man, for Marx, is labor. Regarding his regime, Stalin took this principle of Marx and transformed it in labor camps. We see how a misconception of the idea that work defines man led to an unwanted result.

The last change that we are to analyze in our paper regards how Marx's successors viewed the role of the state. Marx believed that the state must disappear, but Lenin and Bukharin believed that the state could not be dissolved, but rather it should turn into a political and economic dictatorship of the proletariat. Under such circumstances, the state banned the free operation of the market; everything was subject to state planning. The consequences of such thought were unimaginable, relying heavily on terror. In fact, Bukharin, as well as Lenin and later Trotsky, considered that mass

terror as a foundation of economic life is not a transitory condition but a permanent one.

Continuing with the inconsistencies, we discover that in his career as a theorist, Stalin proclaimed a principle that said that as communism advances, the class struggle becomes more and more violent. The purpose of Marx's socialism was precisely the elimination of class struggle and the creation of a calm society, in which each individual can discover his own talents and passions. Marx says that violence is justified only for the removal of capitalism and the gaining of power by the proletariat. After the outbreak of the revolution and the success of socialism, Marx no longer talks about class struggle or the justification of violence. But Stalin, in order to justify his reprisals, persecutions and massacres, altered Marx's ideas to make his actions legitimate.

4. Conclusions

In the final part of our paper we summarize the most important facts revealed in it. We talked about two terms, Marxism and Marxianism, and what are the differences between them. Leszek Kolakowski was the one who set the differences and here we highlighted them in order to see if Marx's theory was applied, on the political level, in the communist regime of Stalin. The conclusion is that Marxianism, which consists of Marx's pure, unaltered ideas, was changed by the will of the dictator, with the purpose to justify his actions of terror and against the people, like censorship, labor camps, violent class struggles etc.

We have seen in this paper that there are important changes in Marx's way of thinking, which are related to the period of his writings. The early Marx and Engels wrote "The Communist Manifesto" and, 25 years after writing it, they considered that some of the ideas were already outdated. Of course that the changes may have a socio-political cause, which means they are not wrong in theory. But one cannot consider a theory written decades ago, like in Stalin's case, or hundreds of years ago, like in our case, to be the foundation of a political regime, because the social, political and economic structure of the countries changes very fast.

No doubt that Marx is the father of socialism, but his ideas were altered so much that we can`t say his ideas are guilty for the terror and inhumanity of Stalin's regime, or any other communist regime from Eastern Europe. And, as a proof, let`s take into consideration the Swedish politics, that applied socialist ideas to create a democratic regime which is often

offered as a model, but this is another subject that we will discuss in another paper.

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