

***"Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement." --Lenin, What Is To Be Done***

# **Marx on How Contradictions are Resolved**

*In the last column, we saw that a contradiction is a struggle between two connected processes, tendencies, or situations. We looked at several contradictions of capitalism, and saw that contradictions can be resolved, that is, come to an end. In this column we summarize Marx's ideas on how this can happen.*

## **Dialectical Contradictions in Thought and in Reality**

The contradictions we have discussed so far are inside the capitalist system, but contradictions occur in other economic systems, in nature, and in thought. Marx wrote that contradictions in reality tend to produce contradictory thoughts and statements, but "contradictions lie in the thing, not the linguistic expression of the thing." Both the contradictions in thought and language and the contradictions in social or natural reality, which are called "real contradictions," can be resolved, but not necessarily in the same way.

Resolution of real contradictions is not immediate but takes time. Real contradictions cause "motion," a process of change that lasts for a while. Examples of motion include objects changing location, circulation of goods or money, immigration, social movements and mobilization of the masses for communism. Motion includes changes in a particular direction as well as oscillations and repetitions in processes, like capitalist crises that happen over and over again.

### **Resolution of Real Contradictions**

During the resolution of a real contradiction, the relationship between the contradictory sides has to change. Marx called this process that leads to resolution "development." Development involves at least four kinds of changes:

(1) Development involves a contradiction becoming simpler and more clearly defined. For example, the transformation of landowners into capitalists is a "movement of reality" that "will simplify the opposition [between labor and capital], drive it to a peak and therefore accelerate its resolution."

(2) In development a contradiction becomes more obvious. For example in a crisis in the world market like the present one, "the "contradictions and oppositions of bourgeois production become striking."

(3) In development a contradiction becomes sharper, more intense, or being "driven to a peak." For example, Marx wrote that England in 1848 was "the country in which the oppositions of modern bourgeois society, the class struggles between bourgeoisie and proletariat, are developed most fully and driven to the highest peak."

(4) In development a contradiction causes motion of some kind. Marx wrote that the process of exchange of commodities "includes relations that contradict and exclude one another. The development of the commodity does not cancel these contradictions, but creates a form within which they can move. This is in general the method through which real contradictions are solved." He also said in *Capital*, Volume I, that the elliptical motion of a planet around the Sun is caused by contradictory factors.

The opposed sides of a real contradiction cannot be unified or reconciled. Development is the only way to resolve their contradiction. Resolution can only happen when the conflict between the two sides is "driven to a peak" and one side defeats the other. Marx sharply attacked people who tried to resolve contradictions without development by "mediating" between the

working class and the bosses, and trying to prevent the two sides from "fighting to a decision."

There may be some contradictions that will not be resolved because they have little or no tendency to develop. This is certainly not true of the basic contradictions of capitalism, since, as the *Communist Manifesto* said, "the development of class opposition [between workers and capitalists] keeps step with the development of industry."

### **Contradictions in Ideas and Theories**

In many cases the process of resolution of contradictions between ideas is the same as with real contradictions. Marx was well known for his determined struggle to defeat wrong ideas and theories, especially in politics and economics. There are cases, however, where opposing points of view may both be partly right, and their contradiction can be resolved by finding the right connections between them. Marx says that this is possible in economic theory and gives an example from mathematics.

### **The Value of Dialectics**

As his comments quoted above show, Marx put a very high value on dialectics. Because dialectics shows that everything changes and nothing lasts forever, Marx saw it as "inherently critical and revolutionary." Surely, he was right. We need to conduct mass education for dialectics, and make it a tool for communist revolution.

*Next: Engels' contribution to dialectics*