

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

## History of Dialectics:

### **STALIN’S DIALECTICS**

In a 1957 speech to a meeting of the world’s communist parties, Mao Zedong claimed that Stalin had “developed metaphysics [i.e., non-dialectical thinking] and harmed dialectics.... Stalin had a very metaphysical viewpoint.” Some others have described Stalin as a mechanical, undialectical thinker. These claims represent an undialectical view of Stalin, whose relation to dialectics changed drastically over his lifetime.

Stalin understood that the class struggle does not end or die out after the working class seizes power, but becomes more intense until capitalism is completely wiped out. As early as 1906, he defended dialectics against anarchism. He wrote that until the capitalists are completely destroyed and all their wealth confiscated, the working class must have a “proletarian guard,” a military force that can defeat the “counterrevolutionary attacks of the dying bourgeoisie.”

After the October revolution, Stalin applied this idea to the struggle to defeat rural capitalists (“kulaks”) who controlled much of the food supply for the cities. “The more we advance,” he said, “the greater will be the resistance of the capitalist elements and the sharper the class struggle.... It never has been and never will be the case that a dying class surrenders its positions voluntarily without attempting to organize resistance.”

This correct idea was opposed by other leaders of the Russian communists. Bukharin claimed that the capitalists would realize that they had lost power and had to submit to rule by the working class. He advocated economic policies to encourage the rural capitalists to produce more. The

1928 “grain strike,” when capitalists would not sell grain and armed workers had to go and seize it to keep the cities from starving, exposed the disastrous nature of Bukharin’s policy and led the communists to begin collectivizing agriculture and eliminating the rural capitalist class.

Stalin’s influence on philosophy in the USSR was not limited to writing and speeches. He encouraged younger comrades to criticize wrong views of the Deborinites (discussed in a previous column), which eventually led to widely used textbooks of dialectics. On the other side, Stalin pushed the development of the seriously wrong idea of “non-antagonistic contradictions,” also discussed previously.

In 1938 the party published a “short course” on its own history. Stalin wrote one section, which became the pamphlet “Dialectical and Historical Materialism.” This pamphlet was hailed by the Soviet press as a terrific advance, but in fact it was a retreat.

The pamphlet omitted one of Engels’ three laws of dialectics, the law of the negation of the negation. This law says that while history doesn’t repeat itself, partial reversals are possible. Stalin’s view was that the accomplishments of socialist construction up to that point were irreversible. But Engels’ law suggests that reversals are possible. Stalin left this law out, without explanation.

A second mistake in the pamphlet was less obvious. Dialectics holds that the internal contradictions in processes are the main factors in determining how those processes change. Thus

the internal contradictions of capitalism are the main cause of its growth and destruction. Lenin had emphasized this point, and the Soviet textbooks of the early 1930s had said so clearly: “The causes of development are not found outside a process, but inside it.” (1932 Leningrad textbook) Mechanists, who opposed dialectics, claimed that it is external factors like geography or climate that determine social development.

In the pamphlet, Stalin wrote that the struggle of the opposite sides of contradictions “constitute the inner content of development.” He did not, however, say that this inner content is decisive or make a clear statement about the relative importance of internal contradictions and external circumstances. This fact, and the omission of Engels’ law are steps backwards in dialectical philosophy.

These steps corresponded to decisive political steps back in USSR in the late 1930s. The biggest of these was the “united front against fascism,” which tried to make an alliance between communists and “good” capitalists, those who were willing to oppose fascism. This “united front” meant ending the demand for world proletarian revolution. In the USSR, Stalin tried but failed to get the communist party to organize elections where the enemies of the revolution (families of rural capitalists, Tsarist officers, priests, etc.) could vote for opposition parties.

There is an unbreakable link between dialectics and revolution. Stalin fought for dialectics, but eventually retreated from real dialectics while he retreated from communist revolution.