

Stalin – 1906

The laws of Dialectical Materialism

Dialectical Materialism is the communist Philosophy which unites the materialistic conception of the world with the dialectical method of analysis. It is the general science of the laws of movement of the world (nature-community-thought), the essence of which is material.

This science is nothing but:

- The product of a certain stage in the evolution of human thought (with the source of thought not being the outside world alone but in the active modification of it by man);
- The conscious and appropriate reflection, the abstraction of laws effectively governing the history of nature and humanity, and which have therefore nothing mysterious about them.

I- The materialistic Conception

It contrasts with Idealism. Its constitutive laws are:

1- The whole world is material, i.e. it exists on its own; matter is the basis for all things and phenomena.

2- Things and phenomena are all determinate, real, concrete; we must at all times make a concrete analysis of the concrete situation and take into account conditions of space and time.

3- Consciousness (or thought) is a reflection, a superior byproduct of nature. The outside world is an objective reality which exists outside the realm of thought, but ideas can nevertheless play an extremely powerful role, under the form of “feedback action”.

What induces the appearance of new, revolutionary ideas, what stirs them up, are the objective social tasks that have become urgent. Nonetheless, the vanguard Party has the means to anticipate, to grasp that which is new-born and has a future, that which is in seed and is in the very first place unnoticed.

ENGELS : *“The great basic question of philosophy is that concerning the relation of thinking and being, of mind and matter”.*

4- There is an objective truth, which is materially based, necessary, independent from our will, and verifiable through the practice of each case; knowledge is afterwards true, valid. Once the forms of the movement of matter are known, we know matter itself. There are no unknowable “things in themselves”!

II- The dialectical Method

It contrasts with metaphysics. Its constitutive laws are:

5- The whole world is ever moving, changing, developing, renewed and reborn in a ceaseless flux, according to objective and concrete laws.

6- Things and phenomena are linked; the world is made up of elements that are interdependent and mutually conditional.

7- Movement has its origin in the action of contradictions which are inherent to things and phenomena. The fundamental task of knowledge is bringing these contradictions up-to-date.

HEGEL : “Contradiction is the very moving principle of the world”.

8- Development goes through qualitative stages; movement is not a simple process of growth, but goes from insignificant quantitative changes to inevitable sudden and radical qualitative transformations.

9- The replacement of the old by the new is done through the “negation of the negation”: any given thing being negated in its corresponding way (as to produce a development), if the negation is doubled, there ensues a higher and more developed unity.

For instance: the grain of barley germinates; as such it ceases to exist and in its place appears the plant. The plant grows, flowers, disappears and gives way to the seed-bearing ear of barley. It is a long way from the original grain since we now have perhaps 30 grains, or else an improved seed.

10- The final result of the movement of things and phenomena is progress, being achieved from the inferior to the superior, through all meandering movements and momentary backtracks. (But all absolute progress is at the same time a relative regression in the sense that it shuts an indefiniteness of ways of development in favour of a single one).

Any violation of each of these laws constitutes a distinctive departure from the theory of knowledge.

The basis for the communist philosophy is materialism. The core of this conception is the theory of reflection (law N°3). The core of the method is the theory of contradiction (law N°7).

N.B. :

- Paradoxically, Stalin exposes the Method before the Conception! This is why I have inverted the order here.

- Here, it is the make-up of Stalin’s classic version of 1938. This was a revision of the 1906 version, part of “Anarchism or Socialism”.

- Point II-9 and the brackets in point II-10 are not by Stalin. (see Anti-Dühring)

- In point II-9 I include Hegel-Engels’ double negation, but I add: “improved seed”.