

I'm sorry this reply is late. I have been overwhelmed by less important but more immediate tasks the past two months.

I applaud the effort initiated by DC; it is very much needed. DC's letter sums up what I consider to be my experience as well as provides both the appropriate spirit and programmatic first steps for beginning this effort.

All the issues DC raises are important. The most important, in my view, are:

- (1) questions about the strategic formulation of the 80s and the AID analysis
- (2) contradictions in the world today
- (3) questions about the United Front strategy
- (4) nature, character, important of mass line in relation to vanguard, and whether valid in different societies.
- (5) democratic centralism.

I would like to see us begin to discuss them as soon as possible, drawing on appropriate reading material.

My sense (and it's only that) is that:

(1) In general, we should know each other's identities so as to facilitate the exchange of ideas among us. That way all communication would not have to go through DC. Those who want anonymity should presumably get it, but if it turns out that 80% of us want anonymity rather than 10%, then maybe we should all be anonymous.

(2) I generally rely on email for many purposes, but this is one case where I think it should be avoided like the plague. Better the postal service or even the telephone; either is more secure than email.

To this end, I've enclosed five \$3 Priority Mail stamps.

As for AM's letter to Avakian:

(1) I appreciate the extraordinary amount of thought and effort that went into it.

(2) I feel compelled to ask, What political points/directions follow from the philosophical analysis? As I read most of the main MLM philosophical texts, the political implications of the philosophical claims are much clearer than is the case with AM's letter to Avakian. (Yes, I've often been called a pragmatist).

(3) At the risk of automatically and unfortunately (at least, in my view) disqualifying myself from this group, I think we need to rethink whether we want to even talk about a science of revolution. The opening pages of *The Science of Revolution's* defense of the notion of a *science* of revolution make no attempt to discuss what science is. Presumably what constitutes science is an activity that has more similarities to what people called physicists, chemists, etc. do than differences.

At this point in history, how does claiming that our activity has more commonalities than differences with the activity of physicists, chemists, etc. bring us one angstrom closer to the

communist future? Rather, calling our activity a science opens the door to all sorts of mechanistic interpretations of Marxism and sterile debates. The history of the past 150 years is littered with such controversies, and we don't need any more.

In fact, I have grave reservations about the term *scientific socialism*. At an earlier time in my life, I reserved differences on that claim. I don't see the need for such reticence now.

Yes, I know the Manifesto proclaims the crucial differences between scientific and utopian socialism. And that Marx in his justly famous letter to Weydemeyer says that one of his unique contributions was proving that the class struggle *necessarily* leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat (my emphasis, the text emphasizes the *d* of the *p*). And that Lenin said this about Marxism being scientific, and that Mao said that.

Perhaps it made sense for Marx and Engels to think of what they were doing as science, if only because in the mid-19th century the activity that was called science promised liberation in so many different aspects of human activity. Furthermore, there's a big difference between concocting arrangements for what the utopians called socialism out of thin air and applying a certain methodology (i.e. historical materialism) to understand how historical developments make the socialism and communism of which Marx and Engels talked--and which we seek--both necessary and possible. But with the benefit of 150 additional years of human activity, it should be clear that no matter how thorough-going our materialism and how deep our understanding of the dialectical method, history cannot be understood and changed in the same way and with the same rigor that the phenomena studied by physicists and biologists are.

Of course, we seek truth from facts. And, of course, without investigation there is little (perhaps no) right to speak. And of course there is a spiral between theory and practice. Mao's exhortations along these lines are an attempt to popularize elements of what is usually called the scientific method into a Confucian culture in which the methodology for acquiring knowledge was quite different. But simply because there is an overlap between Marxism's methods and those of the natural sciences doesn't mean that the similarities outweigh the differences.

Furthermore, we can certainly illustrate, as does AM along with many others in our tradition, the dialectical method by drawing on material typically studied by mathematicians, physicists, and biologists. There is nothing wrong with that. But too much of the MLM tradition assumes that because dialectics can be illustrated with natural and mathematical phenomena, dialectics can thus be used to comprehend/change the social aspects of the world in the same way that the natural aspects are.

There are two reasons why this assumption is unwarranted despite the fact that--as Kuhn teaches and every graduate student knows--even physics, chemistry, etc. are not cumulative but defined by paradigmatic shifts (i.e., revolutions in the modes of conceptualization). The first reason (duh!) is that history is more complicated. It's not just the banality that there are more variables in history than in biology, though that's part of it. But, to be more specific, it has to do with something to which AM's paper astutely calls our attention: the relationship between external causes and internal contradictions. The student of the physical aspect of reality can isolate/control/take account of external causes much more easily than the student of the social aspect can, as the example of the egg and stone illustrates. The second reason is that the historian is much more a part of--and shaped by--what s/he studies than the physicist is of what s/he studies. Yes, as Heisenberg pointed out, measuring a physical phenomenon ultimately affects that phenomenon, but the mutual interaction between history and those who study it is much greater. Given its insistence on uniting theory and practice, one of Marxism's defining characteristics is the

mutual interaction between what is studied and the agent studying it. Such interaction is simply not a defining characteristic of most of what physicists and chemists do.

For both of these reasons, the interrelationships between changing and understanding the social aspects of the world are many times more complicated than those involving the natural aspects (duh! again).

My profession is usually included in the category "social scientist," but the term disgusts me, and I do my best to avoid using it in describing my work. But despite its apologist character, trivial pursuits, and frequent stupidities, contemporary mainstream social science can make some limited claims for success in being able to change the world on the terms that it seeks to understand it, e.g., the use of survey research, focus groups, etc. to influence elections.

However, if there's any folks who should be modest in asserting links between their theory and its ability to change the world, it should be MLMists at this point in history. There are several reasons for such modesty. First, our project--that of transforming the world--is rather ambitious, and our history is littered with embarrassingly premature claims of success. 150 years has given rise to an immense amount of theoretical and practical work, often involving extraordinary courage, dedication, and sacrifice. Presumably these years have also been a learning experience on a world scale. But the way forward and the success of Marxism's project--the communist future--are probably more problematic than at any time since 1848. If it weren't so problematic, there probably wouldn't be a need for a group like this. Hopefully, we will do our part to improve the situation. But given the weakened and imperiled state of the world revolutionary movement despite 150 years of theory and practice, we should, at a minimum, acknowledge that history is likely to remain contingent in ways that our theory will scarcely anticipate and only afterward contestedly comprehend. That kind of theory and its concomitant practice differs so much from what physicists, chemists, etc. do that to describe our activity as science serves more to mystify than clarify what we are all about.

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End of a diatribe that ended up being much longer than anticipated, and is probably an overreaction to having reserved differences on the issue at other places and other times. Please don't feel any need to respond unless you think agreement on the scientific character of Marxism should be a principle of unity of what we (the people whom DC has contacted) will be doing. I'm content to let the issue rest while we deal with the more pressing questions about the strategic formulation of the 80s and the AID analysis, contradictions in the world today, the United Front, etc. Depending on what comes out of these more pressing discussions (which I see as taking a long time given their importance and complexity), we may very well need to consider a wide range of basic philosophical and epistemological questions, but at this point such issues, in my view, can be postponed.

---Brooklyn