I. THE LAWS OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AS A PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM

Marxist philosophy as formulated in the Soviet-Union appears to claim that it is correct and that all other philosophies are false because its ideas, having been derived from practice, reflect reality and because its premises, having been confirmed by practice, constitute objective truth.¹

A number of dogmatic statements make it clear that historical materialism is considered an integral and necessary element of Soviet philosophy², however reluctant one may be to accept historiographic and sociological generalizations as appropriate subjects for philosophical inquiry. According to Soviet philosophy, matter is a philosophical category which stands for the objective reality which exists independent of man.³ Matter is in motion since there can be neither matter without movement nor movement without matter.⁴ Human society is a part of the material world in which the laws and categories of dialectical materialism are valid.⁵ In addition to having stated that the world is a whole in which the individual parts, processes and phenomena are mutually connected⁶, Soviet philosophy maintains that there are laws which determine the necessary relationship between things, phenomena, and processes.⁷

Historical materialism, it is maintained, resulted from the laws of the development of society and of scientific and philosophic thought⁸, the laws of social development being objective laws.⁹ Both the statement that the development of matter and of society proceeds according to objective laws, and that these laws represent the objective truth (because they are based on scientifically verified knowledge of the past¹⁰) belong to the class of absolutely true statements which are said to exist in every field of scientific cognition, and which cannot be nullified by the further course of science and practice.¹¹ This is made quite clear in the statement

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which rejects the notion that human knowledge is in possession of only a very few absolute truths which are confined to trivialities and asserts that "in actual fact, human knowledge contains a profusion of extremely important, absolutely true propositions which the further progress of scientific investigation will not modify". One such proposition is the dogmatic assertion that "the development of society is a process governed by laws", and that "a law determines the general direction of movement necessarily ensuing from other objective conditions". Another is the proposition that mankind as a whole has passed through four successive formations - primitive communal, slave, feudal, and capitalist - and is now living in the epoch of the transition to the next formation, the Communist formation, the first phase of which is called socialism. It is this kind of absolute truth which enables the Marxist-Leninist to apply the collective scientific labor of mankind to the continuous study of relative, i.e. incomplete, truths with the certain prospect of eventually making concrete all absolute truth, a prospect which is accepted a priori as a reality.

Since Soviet philosophy bases itself on the dogmatic assertion of certain absolutely true propositions regarding the historical development of human society, and since it dogmatically asserts that the basic propositions of philosophy, dialectical materialism, and historical materialism are necessarily interrelated, the question arises of what the effect must be on Soviet philosophy as a system of thought if even one of the absolutely true laws of historical development which serve as premises for scientific philosophical investigation is proven to be false.

Against this philosophical background, I propose to show that the proposition that all human society has developed in a generally progressive direction through four objective formations is false, and that it has been shown to be false by Marxist scholars themselves. I propose also to show that the proposition, now advanced as absolutely true, that objective laws determine the historical development of human society is at best a relative truth, lacking final scientific confirmation, by documenting the fact that there are presently on the Marxist books several relative and mutually exclusive variants of supposedly unchangeable and absolute propositions. Inasmuch as the dogmatic basic propositions of Soviet philosophy serve as premises for conclusions in every field of scientific investigation, I propose to submit for consideration the implication for the