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Book Review

STUDY OF THE MANIFESTO

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**Sukomal Sen: Communist Manifesto and Theory of Revolution,
National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1998, pp: 175, Price : Rs. 90.00**

Sukomal Sen's book entitled "Communist Manifesto and Theory of Revolution: Its Relevance to Contemporary Communist Movement" has been published to mark the 150th anniversary of the Communist Manifesto. As the preface itself states: "The Manifesto, which stands out as the greatest of world political literature, literally shook the entire mankind." In today's situation it is widely recognised, even by the enemies of the revolutionary movement, that this single book, rather short pamphlet, has had a profound impact on the course of human development in the last one and a half centuries. Therefore, a deep study of the Manifesto is vital for all revolutionaries and also for historians, sociologists and political scholars. This aspect of the need for deeper study is very relevant in the context of the wrong tendency even amongst serious revolutionaries to be satisfied with a few quotations from this immortal document; and, to simply declare their "faith" in the validity of the ideas of the Communist Manifesto. As Marx and Engels themselves repeatedly asserted the science of Marxism can only be properly understood by patient and painstaking efforts. The science of Marxism cannot be compressed into a collection of quotations and teachings to be applied to all situations but is only an invaluable guide to understand changing realities, in a scientific manner, to be utilised as a guide for action.

This book is a serious attempt to deal with the essentials of the Communist Manifesto, in the light of the above mentioned approach.

As the preface states: "The present volume seeks to trace the origin of the Communist Manifesto, the social, historical, economic and philosophical background in which the Manifesto was born. At the

same time, the book makes a humble attempt for exposition of the basic theoretical formulations made by the Manifesto along with some other formulations directly connected with it. But it should not at all be construed as a comprehensive discourse on Marxism."

Such an attempt evidently is a very difficult task. The author has, in the course of 175 pages, made a serious effort to meet the objective mentioned in the preface, by studiously going into the innumerable writings of Marx, Engels and some others. The book, rather ambitiously tries to encompass in its relatively brief text, a vast number of themes and problems connected with the past as well as with the present-day aspects of history. The vast compass of the book naturally covers the developments of the philosophical and historical background in which the Manifesto was born. As a matter of fact, the first four chapters deal with the scientific and connected philosophical approach of the young Marx and Engels. The steady evolution of Marx's ideological thoughts, as manifested in a number of books before the Manifesto was published, is analysed comprehensively. These chapters also deal with the development of Marxist ideas, not in the abstract but in the process of constant and sometimes ruthless criticism of various trends in European philosophical, ideological and economic thinking. Through these chapters, the reader can understand the very dialectical manner through which the basic ideas of Marxism got utilised. In particular, the pages dealing with the various trends of utopian socialism which preceded the development of scientific socialism, has been effectively dealt with.

It is actually chapters five and six of the book which comprehensively deal with the background in which the emerging new proletarian party, the Communist League, was confronted with the need for a Manifesto outlining the fundamental vision of scientific socialism. The book, while giving this background to the publication of the Manifesto in chapter five, precedes to present the basic ideas of the Communist Manifesto in chapter six.

Instead of confining himself to such an exposition, the author proceeds to explain the various aspects of the Manifesto which directly or indirectly outlined the theory of revolution. Chapter seven validly analyses various questions connected with revolutionary theory and practice. In particular, the relation between the democratic revolution and the socialist revolution is sought to be explained. The attitude of the Communist Manifesto

towards the fight against feudal despotism even under conditions when the proletariat was only an emerging class but numerically small force, and the problems posed by such a situation have been dealt with. The analysis of the role of various classes -- the bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie, the peasantry, and the lumpen-proletariat -- is thought-provoking.

The author has in a few pages, even dealt with the problem of the degeneration of political power following revolutions by the reference to "Bonapartism". Through these chapters, the author in a compact manner has tried to analyse the political and economic developments following the publication of the Manifesto. In particular, the prefaces to the Communist Manifesto written by Marx and Engels without new editions were published in various languages themselves reveal that Marx and Engels were continuously subjecting the formulations of the original text to rigorous scrutiny. Actually, the prefaces provide us with very valuable insight into the scientific manner in which the approached changing history. The author has given the necessary attention to this aspect.

Without confining himself to the basic content of the Manifesto and the problems of revolutionary practice flowing from these the author has dealt with the political and social developments of the present century and refers to some of the problems presented by today's realities. He even attempted to analyse the new developments in science and tried to interpret them in the light of dialectical materialism. The few pages giving Marx's famous statement that he has never claimed that all that he or Engels have written were eternal truths and his quip that "I am not a Marxist" has been brought out by the author reminds the new generations that Marx himself considered his teachings only as an attempt to use certain fundamental concepts to understand reality.

The interesting aspect of the book is that in the course of a few pages, the author seeks to deal with the very serious problems faced by revolutionaries after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the setbacks suffered by the Communism. These aspects need much deeper study and discussions. The author's comments can contribute to further discussion. The very important ideological problem faced by Communist movement regarding the changes in the structure of the working class in the context of the scientific and technological revolution has been dealt with by the author in the

concluding sections. This is a matter of vital importance and needs very serious discussion.

The very wide and sweeping canvass of the book trying to depict nearly two centuries of human development in the philosophical, social, economic and political spheres, in the context of the Communist Manifesto is indeed an ambitious effort. The very nature of this effort will make the book and its contents rather difficult to read for many readers. Yet, the publication of the book will contribute to a better and more useful study of the Manifesto and basic Marxist books.