

The Fundamental Ideal of Marxism

–Richard R. Losch+

The central principle of Marxism on which everything else in the Marxist philosophy hangs is “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” On the surface this epigram sounds fair, noble and just. The only problem is that if we examine it carefully we find that it is not at all fair, noble, or just. In fact, the basic concept is not only unworkable when we consider human nature, but it is also fundamentally immoral and evil.

The concept is unworkable because it assumes that each person will produce to the extent of his ability, and willingly share with those who have less than they need whatever he has that is beyond his own needs. While this would be nobly altruistic, it is not in the least realistic. In any society there will always be those who are able to produce more than they need, and those who, for whatever reason, cannot even meet their basic needs. The problem is that there will also be a third group: those who are capable of meeting their own needs, but will not bother to do so as long as there are those who will provide for them. In an ideal society that last group would not exist, but until there is some miraculous transformation of human nature it will continue to exist. There are some societies, such as the Hutterites, the Amana and Shaker communities, and various monastic communities, where communalism works well and everyone prospers. While these are often held up as examples to validate the Marxist principle, there is one serious catch. Most of these communities are founded on a deep-seated religious belief that is based on the principle of commonality and total equality. Those who are a part of them are voluntarily committed to the principle, and see it as the road to salvation. That is a powerful incentive. Marx eliminates that option, however, by declaring that his philosophy and religion are incompatible. The State, not God, must provide the guiding principle. These societies also all have the option to expel from the community anyone who fails to pull his own load to the best of his ability. Where participation is not voluntary, the system cannot work. When a person works hard to produce and then much of what he has produced is taken from him and given to others, he will quickly lose the incentive to produce. If forced by the threat of punishment, he will waste much of his ability in trying to find ways to get around the requirement to produce. The only effective coercion that a political entity can offer is the threat of suffering, imprisonment, exile or death. The principle then degenerated to “From each according to his productivity” as that productivity continues to lessen.

The Marxist principle is also fundamentally immoral on several levels. By recognizing that there are those with ability and those with need, it acknowledges that by nature all people are not equal. They may be created equal and seen as equal

in the eyes of God (a concept incompatible with Marx's teaching), but simple observation confirms that people are unequal in countless ways, including talent and intelligence. Notwithstanding, Marxism seeks to redistribute property in an attempt to make all people equal. This is a paradox, however. Even if that equality in material things is achieved, there will always be a need to continue to produce, because everyone, the able and the needy alike, has continuing needs that must be fulfilled. This means that some will continue to have to produce more than they need, and some will continue to consume more than they produce. Where is the equity in that? The only solution is to eliminate all who do not produce. This is what happened in Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia and Maoist China, when they sought to eliminate the "unfit" and the "unworthy." And who determines that fitness or worth?

Then there arises an even more critical moral issue. Who is to determine one's ability or need? The concept of need is open-ended, because the line between need and want is so diffused that it is often impossible to distinguish one from the other. We often cannot even do so in ourselves. How can one be expected to discern them in others? As has happened in a number of societies who have tried Marxism, this need to judge inevitably leads to a privileged elite who make such decisions, and are not subject to the same restrictions as the masses. That by its very nature ends the equality of all, producing some who are "more equal than others." Human nature being what it is, it is equally inevitable that once this happens, power struggles will develop among the privileged class. Some in power will be toppled from grace and be destroyed, while others will rise up to replace them, fulfilling Arthur Koestler's prophecy that Communism always ends up "eating its own."

In fine, what appears on the surface to be a noble ideal is in fact an impracticable and immoral principle that is inexorably doomed to failure.