

We publish below an English translation of a lecture given at a meeting of the General Economics Section of the Institute for Economics, Moscow, by I.I. Rubin in May and June 1927. The corrected transcription was first published in *Under the Banner of Marxism*. This translation has been made from the German, I.I. Rubin, S.A. Bessonov et al: *Dialektik der Kategorien: Debatte in der UdSSR (1927-29)* (VSA, West Berlin, 1975).

The lecture develops one of the main themes of Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, thus providing a useful introduction to the latter work, while developing beyond it in important respects. The lecture aims to bring out more clearly than had the *Essays* the distinction between the social commensurability of labour that is characteristic of any society that is based on the division of labour, and the specific form in which this commensuration is achieved in capitalist society, the form of abstract labour. The lecture thus centres on a further investigation of the concept of the form of value and brings out particularly clearly the significance of the distinctions between value and exchange value, and between abstract and embodied labour, as well as contributing to the debate about the methodology of *Capital*. At the time the lecture was given these issues were of the greatest political significance, for in the period of the NEP, when Rubin's influence was at its greatest, the question of the applicability of the "law of value" under socialism, and so the proper understanding of the concept of value, was of the utmost importance to the future development of the Soviet Union. Despite the already intensifying repression it was therefore still possible to examine the foundations of Marxism. With the abandonment of the NEP and the switch to the 'general line' such critical examination became increasingly intolerable for the Soviet state as heterodoxy in theory came to be identified with economic sabotage and foreign intervention in the subversion of established state policy. Thus, Rubin, along with other leading Marxist theorists whose works have recently been rediscovered (like Pashukanis and Volosinov) fell victim to the purges of the 1930s.

Isaac Il'ich Rubin was born in 1896. He joined the Bund in 1904 and became a member of its Central Committee. He later joined the Mensheviks and was elected to their Central Committee in the autumn of 1920. Trained originally as a lawyer, his handbooks on conciliation and arbitration and on unemployment insurance were published by the Moscow Soviet in 1917-18. He was imprisoned by the GPU in 1923-4 in the round-up of Mensheviks. On his release he dropped his political work to concentrate on his academic studies and teaching. From 1926-30 he was a Research Associate at the Marx-Engels Institute under Ryazanov, to whom he was very close, becoming one of the most influential interpreters of Marx's work. During this period he published several books: *Contemporary Economists in the West*; *Classics of Political Economy from the 17th to mid-19th centuries*; *A History of Economic Thought*; *History of Class Struggles*; *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, and co-edited *Fundamental Problems of Political Economy*.

Rubin's former association with Menshevism led to his arrest in December 1930 and his inclusion in the Menshevik trial of March 1931, in which he was accused of collaboration with a supposed "Union Bureau of the Central Committee of the RSDRP" financed and directed from abroad. The charges were ludicrous, and the evidence internally contradictory and in a number of instances clearly false. However Rubin, like the other accused, made a full confession of his "guilt", a confession extracted by the use of sustained and extreme torture (see Medvedev, pp.1 32-6).

The trial was designed as an object lesson to the Bolshevik right opposition and to the Trotskyists. Rubin was included in order to incriminate Ryazanov, who was sacked and expelled from the party as a result of Rubin's "confession" "for treason to the Party and direct aid to the Menshevik interventionists". In anticipation of his trial Rubin was denounced in *Bolshevik*, 2, 1930 by V. Milyutin and D. Bovilin as follows: "I.I. Rubin is the ideologist and representative of the ideology of the theoreticians of the Second International in Political Economy... It is a great error to describe I.I. Rubin as a fighter for orthodox Marxism against the 'social school', or to accept uncritically and with negligible reservations a number of his theoretical assertions as strictly Marxist." To the article was appended a statement announcing the complete cessation of press discussion of the views of Rubin

and his followers. However it proved necessary to publish further diatribes by Bovilin in *Pravda* in its issues of 13/1/31 and 7/3/31, the first called "Let us tear out *Rubinschina* by the roots".

Rubin was sentenced to five years in jail. After three years in solitary confinement he was exiled to Turgai and then to Aktiubinsk, where he worked as a plan economist in the consumer cooperative and continued his own work. Arrested again in 1937 Rubin was transferred from Aktiubinsk and disappeared for good. As a recent Soviet philosopher, Rosenthal, has observed: "The Communist Party has destroyed this tendency, which is quite alien to Marxism, and assisted Soviet philosophers and economists to unmask its essence" (quoted Rosdolsky, p.570n). We are very pleased to publish Rubin's "mischief" (ibid) here.

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