

MARX AND PEASANTRY

THAKORE MISTRY

TO MARX the written "history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles".¹ The antagonistic classes are free man and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, capitalist and proletariat. They are, in brief, the haves and the have-nots. The distinction is made on the basis of the ownership of the means of production. The antagonism therefore exists between the class that owns the means of production and the class that does not. Marx has moreover made a reference to another kind of conflict which he termed "anti-thesis" between town and country: "It may be said, that the whole economical history of society is summed up in the movement of this anti-thesis". In the same breath he mentions significantly that this "anti-thesis" constitutes the foundation of every division of labour that is well-developed.² The division of labour is a technical matter and cannot constitute a cleavage of irreconcilable interests between town and countryside. Marx considered class antagonism based on the property relations alone to be fundamental.

But it is ironical that the application of Marxism for developing the economically backward countries has brought out fully the antagonism inherent in the "anti-thesis" between town and country and earned for Marx the notoriety of 'being against the peasant'.³ One could quote Marx and his disciples profusely to prove that he had scant regard for the peasants and their economy. He was scornful towards the inferior mode of production of the small peasants. Unlike Narodniki, he never considered agricultural way of life to be any way idyllic. Marx, on the other hand, hailed *bourgeois* progress for rescuing "a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of

¹ MARX, KARL, *Communist Manifesto*, Allen and Unwin, 1954, p. 119.

² MARX, KARL, *Capital*, Vol. I, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1965, p. 352.

³ MITRANY, DAVID, *Marx Against the Peasant*, Collier Books, 1961. It provides a detailed and well-documented study of that aspect of Marxist theory and practice which bears upon the interests of peasantry as a class.